



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

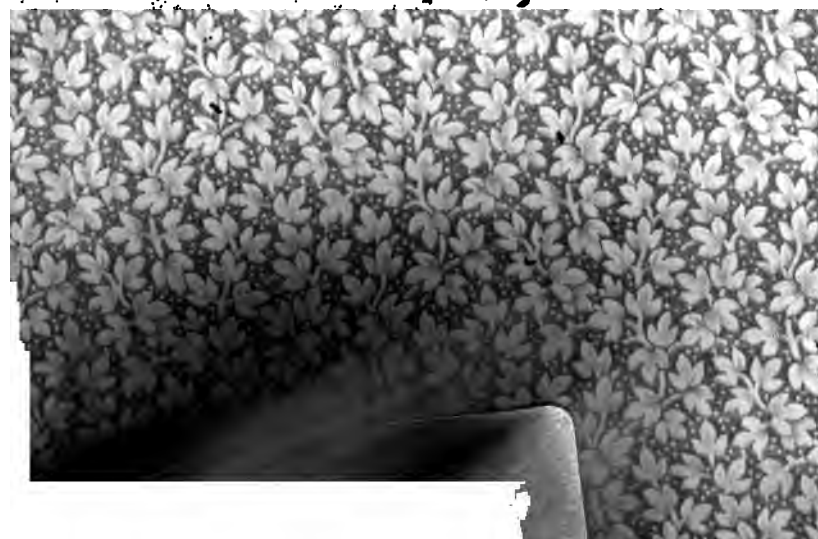
A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE

By

MRS ALEXANDER FRASER



"Man's Love is of Man's Life
a Thing Apart"



NOTICE.

IMPORTANT NEW WORK by the Author of
"Recommended to Mercy."

AT ALL THE LIBRARIES.

In 2 vols., Crown 8vo, 18s.

MEMORIES OF
WORLD-KNOWN MEN,

By MRS. HOUSTOUN,

Author of "Twenty Years in the Wild West,"
"A Yachting Voyage to the Gulf of Mexico,"
 &c., &c.,

Containing Personal Recollections of . .

WORDSWORTH, JOHN WILSON CROKER,
THEODORE HOOK, WILLIAM IV., the late
LORD DERBY, MRS. NORTON, HARRISON
AINSWORTH, and other well-known personages

F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.



600067092U



A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE.

F. V. WHITE & CO.'S SELECT NOVELS.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. each.

The Following Volumes of the Series are Now Ready,
*And can be obtained of all Booksellers in Town
and Country, and at all Railway Bookstalls.*

MY SISTER THE ACTRESS. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "The Root of all Evil," &c., &c.

THE DEAN'S WIFE. By MRS. EILOART, Author of "The Love that Lived," &c., &c.

TWO MEN AND A MAID. By HARRIETT JAY, Author of "The Queen of Connaught," &c., &c.

A BROKEN BLOSSOM. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "Phyllida," &c., &c.

SWEETHEART AND WIFE. By LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD, Author of "Mollie Darling," &c., &c.

BARBARA'S WARNING. By MRS. HOUSTOUN, Author of "Recommended to Mercy," &c., &c.

PHYLLIDA. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "My Sister the Actress," &c., &c.

SOME OF OUR GIRLS. By MRS. EILOART, Author of "The Dean's Wife," &c., &c.

ALLERTON TOWERS. By ANNIE THOMAS (Mrs. Pender Cudlip), Author of "Denis Donne," &c., &c.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "Phyllida," &c., &c.

A PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY. By MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER, Author of "Guardian and Lover," &c., &c.

MOLLIE DARLING. By LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD, Author of "Sweetheart and Wife."

F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31, Southampton Street, Strand.

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER,

AUTHOR OF "HER FLIGHTED TROTH;" "A PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY;"

"GUARDIAN AND LOVER;" "A FATAL PASSION:"

"A PEERESS OF 1882," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart—
'Tis woman's whole existence."

LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO., 31, SOUTHAMPTON ST., STRAND.

1883.

251. k 636.



PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO., GATE STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS ;
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

DEDICATION.

The malignant Diety, Criticism, dwelt on the top of a snowy mountain in Nova Zembla.

Momus found her extended in her den upon the spoils of numberless volumes half devoured.

At her right hand sat Ignorance, her husband, and father, blind with age; at her left, Pride, her mother, dressing her up in the scraps of paper herself had torn; there was Opinion, her sister, light of foot, hoodwinked and headstrong, yet giddy and perpetually turning.

About her played her children, Noise and Impudence, Dulness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry and Ill Manners.

SWIFT.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—BELLA GRANT	1
II.—LADY ENNISFORD	32
III.—COULEUR DE ROSE	48
IV.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END	64
V.—PRESCIENCE	88
VI.—THE SERPENT ON THE HEARTH	100
VII.—POUR Y PARVENIR	126
VIII.—A WINNING GAME	157
IX.—A CONJUGAL TETE-A-TETE	184
X.—SHE'LL DIE—MY LORD	206

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE.


CHAPTER I.

BELLA GRANT.

Yea ! hope at highest and all her fruit
And Time at fullest and all his dower,
I had given you surely—and life to boot !
* * * * *

Yea ! I know this well—were you once sealed mine,
Mine in the blood's heat—mine in the breath,
* * * * *

Not time that sayeth or gainsayeth,
Nor all strong things had severed us then !”

“HE marriage of the Marquis of Ennisford with the Lady Frances Clavering, second daughter of the Duke of Sandowne, was solemnised by special license this morning at St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square. The bride wore a bodice and train of superb white *satin duchesse*,

over a petticoat, exquisitely embroidered in silver *fleur de lys*, and edged with *coquilles* of finest Alençon. A veil of the same magnificent lace and a chaplet of natural orange blossoms were fastened by three diamond stars, and a spray of diamonds held a bunch of orange blossoms at her throat. The six bridesmaids were dressed alike in primrose satin Louis Quinze bodices and *terra cotta* velvet skirts, and their Gainsborough hats were tastefully arranged with tufts of primroses and feather pompons.

“The wedding breakfast was given at the ducal mansion in Belgrave Square, covers being laid for sixty. At two o'clock Lord and Lady Ennisford started for Highcliffe Towers, Hampshire, where they will pass the honeymoon. The bridal gifts were splendid and numerous, and included an

Indian shawl from Her Majesty the Queen.”
—*Vide* “Court Journal.”

“So Ennisford is *really* married! I never believed it would have come off,” little Mrs. Walsingham says, with a decided *souçon* of regret in her liquid voice. She is one of a small knot of idlers—one bright June morning in the Row. “To think that the most fickle of butterflies and the biggest flirt in town should be transmogrified into that dullest and most uninteresting of bores, *a husband!* What do *you* think of marriage, Lord Aylmer?”

“What do *I* think of marriage?” he growls—he is a cynical man, and he hates his wife—“I take it as those that deny purgatory—

“ ‘It locally contains no heaven or hell
There’s no third place in it!’

Ennisford has put the halter round his own

neck, however, so he'll have to grin and bear it."

"Lady Frances—I beg her pardon, *Lady Ennisford*—looked *almost* pretty in her bridal paraphernalia," puts in Mrs. Temple, who, being a delicious blonde, can afford to be charitable when she likes.

"If she had not cried! I wonder why she cried?" Mrs. Walsingham murmurs, reflectively, her dainty head crowned with a wealth of venetian-hued tresses, drooping a little to one side, and her cerise-lined sunshade touching her pretty sentimental face with the tint of a sea-shell. "She *must* have married for love, you know. She did not want money or position; besides, Ennisford is so awfully—awfully nice! especially when he likes to be so," and she sighs, evidently a regretful sigh, for the days that are no more, when "Ennisford"

was used to whisper soft nothings in her ear on the box seat of his drag, down to Hurlingham or to a Richmond or Greenwich dinner.


He has plenty to answer for in the way of damage to what we are pleased, in this nineteenth century, to dignify by the name of "hearts," but which may be classed as hollow muscles or sieves.

"A pity, then, that you women have done your best to spoil his niceness," Lord Aylmer observes, grimly. "Ennisford is not a bad sort with *men*, but the devil with women! Ruined—just ruined—because you have all chosen to run a neck-to-neck race for him. An excellent joke, however, that Lady Frances, *not* a beauty, and an outsider, has won easily in a canter!"

"Hateful man!" the two ladies whisper simultaneously, as if the devil were be-

tween them; and, turning their prune Directoire coat tails and puffed paniers towards him, they commence an animated discussion on the respective merits of *bouillons* and kiltings, until Lord Aylmer's accents attract their attention once more.

"It's not much of happiness Ennisford will give that poor girl," he mutters, half in soliloquy. "He comes of a flighty stock. Bramber is a pompous old fool, too dull to be a *mauvais sujet*, but his ancestors in the female line beat Récamier hollow. They were a pack of fast jades! It's not in Ennisford's blood to be steady, and he's got the bit between his teeth, and is sure to go slap bang through everything to the old gentleman. Little Lady Frances deserves a good husband. I haven't much opinion of women—bad's the best of them!—but the child has less nonsense about her than the gene-



rality of her sex, and is a credit to any man's taste."

"Ennisford's wife ought to be A 1 in beauty. Nobody but you, Lord Aylmer, with your *outré* notions, would ever look at Lady Frances, or think her half good enough for the prize she has picked up in the lottery of life," Mrs. Walsingham cries, effusively, envying Lady Frances with all her soul.

"And the world is full of knaves and fools to tell Ennisford so—if not now, some time," Lord Aylmer snaps, viciously. "How plain I see that time : discord, misery, flirtation—even worse on his side ; jealousy on hers ; a house divided against itself, the Divorce Court, and two lives spoiled ! I own Ennisford *au bout des ongles*, and I know he has every possibility in him but the one to make his wife happy ; he is as unstable as water."

“He worships beauty more than any one I know,” Mrs. Walsingham says, with a conscious blush. “A *plain* woman will never satisfy his eye or his heart, poor fellow.”

“Poor fellow, indeed! You should reserve your pity for the plain woman and not for the man, who goes in for lust of the eye, Mrs. Walsingham; and it strikes me that the professional beauties did not satisfy him either,” Lord Aylmer adds, maliciously, with a meaning look.

“He might just as well have married Bella Grant as Lady Frances. They are matched in plainness,” Mrs. Temple says, suavely. “All the world knows that Bella is devoted to him, and he *ought* to have married her! He has treated her shamefully! He made as much love to her as he wished, with the ridiculous excuse of being her cousin. She looked like a ghost

at the church this morning, and when Ennisford kissed his bride, Bella shut down her lids with a snap and compressed her lips, and such an expression swept over her face!—ugh! it makes me shiver to think of it!”

“ ‘Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
And Hell no fury like a woman scorned,’ ”

Lord Aylmer quotes, with a cynical smile.

“I’ll lay a wager that Miss Grant not only looks like a ghost, but felt like a demon when the Gordian knot was tied.”

“Sir James Hannen can untie it, you know, and while ‘there’s life, there’s hope,’ ” little Mrs. Walsingham observes, as softly and sweetly as if she were prophesying some good thing.

“And Sir James Hannen probably—*will*,” Lord Aylmer adds, unctuously.

It is quite true what they say about Bella Grant.

Bella Grant had looked like a ghost and felt like a demon at the church, had stood like a stone in her capacity of bridesmaid, and committed murder in her soul all the while. In bitter regret and hopelessness she had mentally apostrophised the man who had deserted her :

“ I wish you were dead, my dear ;
I would give you, had I to give,
Some death too bitter to fear
It is better to die than live ;
I wish you were stricken of thunder,
And burnt with a bright flame through,
Consumed and cloven in sunder—
I dead at your feet, like you ! ”

And at the time while the trio in the Row discuss the ceremony at St. Peter's, Bella, escaping from the trial of the marriage “ baked meats,” has passed rapidly and breathlessly up the grand staircase of the ducal residence, and, reaching her own room, has bolted the door.

At last ! she is alone—alone, with no

prying eyes to mark her supreme folly—to mock at her bitter, *bitter* anguish! Flinging off impatiently all the hateful bridal paraphernalia that seems to scorch and brand her flesh, she sends the primrose satin and terra-cotta velvet flying to the other end of the chamber, and the dainty Gainsborough, with its tufts and pompons, follows suit.

Vanitas vanitatum!

Sackcloth and ashes are the garments she should wear, poor, wretched, passionate, erring, and wronged creature; a victim of woman's faith and of man's falsity.

She rushes to a chair beside her bed and, burying her face in her pillow, half smothers back the sobs—the hard, dry, harrowing sobs that break with a rapidity of passion that cannot be restrained.

At last they sink lower and lower, until they grow like a deep, low wail, piercing and wretched enough to be the weird cry of one of Dante's lost souls. Yet—

“Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,
To think of things that are well outworn?
Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,
The dream foregone, and the deed foreborne?”

In the midst of her sobs Bella rises suddenly, and going to a small ivory box that stands on an ancient marqueterie bureau, she unlocks it with a little key that is attached to her watch chain, and takes out a picture.

A faded picture, with the colours all faint and feeble with the rough brush of old Time's hand. It is the photograph, apparently, of a very young man, for the maiden moustache consists only of a scrap of fluffy down. The blue eyes look out wonderfully frank and guileless, and the

tints are all pink and white, like a doll's or a baby's.

It is the photograph, in fact, of George, Lord Ennisford, taken some years back, and Bella, laying it on the pillow, fond, foolish woman as she is, gazes at it, presses her dark cheek to it, snatches it up and kisses it with a fierce pain and hard pleasure, and then, with big, burning, tearless eyes, addresses it :

“Gone!—gone for ever! Oh, can it be, Ennisford, that you have really cast me aside!—that I am nothing to you now—*nothing!* How can I live without you for ever—ever—without you! I cannot, I can—*not*, I *will* not! Oh, Ennisford! Ennisford! whom I loved for years—whom I shall love till I die!—Ennisford!”

The name dies out in a whisper from her white, shaking lips, and her figure sways

like a leaf in the storm. Then, like a mad woman, she hurls down the picture of her faithless lover and stamps on it till every vestige of likeness to him is destroyed.

After this she sinks down on the floor and stares with blank, vacant eyes at her handiwork.

Her surroundings are *bizarre* enough for a woman who, if not a born aristocrat, is yet allied to the best blood of England. The room has a cold, chilly aspect, and it is furnished with that rigid simplicity that one would expect in the cell of an enthusiastic devotee in her noviciate.

The walls are of a pale, ashen hue, unrelieved by mirror or adornment. The curtains match them. A huge crucifix, a work of Veronese art, hangs at the head of the bed. The toilet table is totally devoid of those absurd yet refined super-

fluties that the feminine mind delighteth in as a rule, and just a slip of carpet lies on the polished floor; but there are ponderous volumes in sombre, severe bindings, that contain deep, learned thoughts and words, and a large basket heaped over with coarse garments—such as Charity deals out to the poor—occupies a prominent position by the window.


It is evidently a working as well as a sleeping room; for Bella, in spite of her backsliding, is of a thoroughly practical nature, which is curiously at variance with the gusts of passion and pathos that sweep over her frame and find voice in low, bitter sobs.

After a while she rises from her lowly position, picks up the irretrievably injured photograph, and lifts up a white face, passing a trembling hand over it, as if to

try and smooth out the anguish from her features.

She has the figure of a girl—tall, with a certain lithesome and willowy grace about it; but she has the face of a woman who has seen quite thirty summers. At this moment she looks as if she had lived many more, for hers is one of those mobile faces that passion makes quite old before its time, and even a feeling of pity and sympathy for her cannot make her face a pleasant one to look upon.

As its grief merges into an aspect of hard, stony coldness, the habitual expression begins to creep out on the features. No one feature is positively bad or ugly; there is even a suggestion of rugged beauty in the outline, but the *tout ensemble* is far from alluring. The lips are too thin and severe, the eyes too close together under a pair of



too darkly-defined brows; and though the eyes themselves are brilliant, they are fitful and can be furtive. At will they are capable of a strong, steady, scrutinising gaze, which cannot fail to render uncomfortable the individual on whom it is fixed; but the moment the gaze is detected, the grey eyes lift and glance off with an expression that is equally doubtful and aggravating.

Yet Bella Grant's face is one that might have been almost good-looking, if a fortunate life and glad spirit shone through it. Disappointment, chagrin, sin, love, hatred, a desire for revenge, make it look as it does now—a face of which one might be afraid.

Whilst the photograph had lain on the pillow with her cheek pressed to it—the photograph of a man whom she loves with a wild, unreasoning, idolatrous, selfish passion—she had registered an oath.

Lord Ennisford—flirt and butterfly—has played fast and loose with scores of women in town. Some regret his love ; some have even in a few hours resigned themselves to the inevitable ; but Bella Grant is not of the common herd : she can love, and she can hate—with her grey gleaming eyes, her white passion-tossed features, her tumultuous implacable spirit, her iron will ; she regrets, but she does not dream of growing resigned.

Lord Ennisford has laid a burthen on her which she cannot bear. She has but one animus left in life—but one object to which her heart and soul and brain shall be devoted ; and, as brain preponderates over heart and soul, there is not much chance that any sentiment or pity will sue for clemency at her hands towards the objects of her revenge.

She has sworn to separate the man she loves, and who has loved her, after the fashion of some men's love, in these years gone by, from the wife he has taken.

To her the words, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," are but idle prattle—a mere formula of the Church—a creed which her blind unbelief makes her mock at and fling aside like the voice of the wind.

Honour and loyalty are dead letters to such women as Bella Grant. Strong and practical of nature, animal in instinct and passion, savage and cruel in their greed of love, it is not likely that women possessing such qualifications can wage war and be beaten.

Cunning, craftiness, deceit and falsity ranged against truth, innocence, purity and simple-mindedness form a very uneven

contest, my readers ; and in spite of the pleasant doctrine that goodness rears its crest over badness, I believe that human creatures of the Bella Grant type have often a better turn of it in this world than their purer sisterhood. Miss Grant had not left Lord Ennisford in ignorance of her wounded and desperate passion ; she was not of the nature of a violet, or likely to let “concealment like a worm, etc.”

“So you are going to be *married!*” she said to him, suddenly, one day.

He looked at her. To say that he quailed would be the truth. There is more moral cowardice in men than in women, as a rule.

She stood like an image in marble, immovable, a trifle gaunt, her tall figure pulled well up to its fullest height, her

features rigid and white as a sheet, and only her strange eyes burning with quite a wild, hungry, ferocious look as they rested keenly on the blond, rather effeminate face of her fickle, faithless lover.

For he had been her lover; he had beguiled her by those sweet words that are as sweet now as when Adam had whispered them to his Eve in Paradise; he had beguiled her by those soft treacherous kisses in which the cruel beak of the vulture is hid beneath the tender touch of the dove, until the woman, naturally good, and to other men cold as ice, hard as stone, fell down from her pedestal of pride, and learnt to find all she knew of happiness in the caresses that had been showered lavishly, then dealt out sparingly to her: a strange and fitful happiness, with nothing satisfactory even at its

best, and leaving nothing behind it after all but

“Weed from the water, grass from the grave,
A broken blossom, a ruined rhyme.”

Why Lord Ennisford had done as he had done it was difficult to tell. The man worshipped beauty, and this woman had neither beauty nor glamour to entice him. Her only attraction lay in her intense contrast to the other women of the London world with whom his flirtations were as numerous as stars in a southern sky. With her grey, ghoulisn eyes, her abrupt, wild manner, her *bizarre* words and ways, and the very vehemence and intensity of her passion that repelled even while it attracted, his erratic fancy had been caught and enchained for a while. Once free again after this, what breath can fill and reinspire a dead love?

“And you have kept it from me—from



me!" Bella Grant went on, in a quiet, hushed voice that yet teemed with a keen concentrated scorn than cut like whipcord, and from which the man, culpable as he was, shrank back uncomfortably. For Lord Ennisford was thoroughly epicurean in his liking for pleasantness, and a mental tussle disturbed his equanimity.

"I did not like to tell you, Bella! I was afraid the news might pain you," he answered with mistaken mildness; for, however much he had wronged her, she was not of the sort to hoist up the white flag before. "I feel so much for you! My affection has not changed a bit. No one can fill your place—I swear it! But marriage between cousins is not a good thing, Bella. I *must* marry; the dad wants me to settle down and sow my wild oats, he says; and I am sick of loafing about town."

“Couldn’t I have made a home for you, George?” and she flung herself down on the floor and wreathed her arms round his knees, while her fierce hungry eyes, with something feline about them, devoured his good-looking face. “Couldn’t I have made a home for you? George! George! who will love you as I do? Who will hunger and thirst for your every word and look like me? I would bear anything for your sake, shame, humiliation, poverty—even death—*if*, so long as I live, no other woman has a right to cling to you like this!” and springing up, she threw herself on his breast, pallid, quivering from head to foot, storm beaten. “George! George! for God’s sake don’t give me up!” she cried. But he summoned up courage and put her gently aside.

“No, Bella! My word is pledged and I

shall marry Frances—But my home shall be yours whenever you like!” he added rather feebly, for even while he spoke the words he felt that it was shameful to the girl he married to let this woman, hard and reckless, through his fault, breathe the same air : yet his hands were tied, things had been said and *written*, and he knew he was in the power of an unscrupulous spirit.

Something of these thoughts, perhaps, made themselves legible in his troubled eyes to her keen gaze.

“Is that *quite* true, George—*quite* true? Will your home be open to me? Shall I—the poor, discarded creature, whom it has been your sovereign will to toy with and fling aside—be allowed to go near the hem of my Lady Ennisford’s garment?” she asked, with an ill-concealed sneer.

Once more he felt the hot, indignant

blood rush to his face as he listened and saw. But there was no help for it; as men sow, so must they reap. And with a feeling of positive aversion towards her he answered,

“Of course! I can never have anything I would not share with you, Bella!”

“Even your wife—even your—*wife*? George! I hate her! I loathe her! I would kill her if I could, and then kill myself! O, George! have you grown utterly hard and cold and strange!—have you no mercy, no pity, no right, no compunction! Can you stand there like a stock or a stone and trample on my heart like this! Don’t you *know*, George, that you are *mine*—my very own, my *husband* in the eyes of God, if not in the eyes of men! Do you forget the kisses, the specious words that have fallen from your lips, the oaths on your bended

knees, that if I loved you—loved you madly, utterly, with that absorbing love that a woman gives but once in her life, the love that is the very essence of herself, that is her life, her all—that you would never forsake me, never leave me! You are a man, I but a woman; you are the stronger, I the weaker vessel! It is *you* who should have saved me from myself. It is you who should have placed a dam against the sluice-gates of a love that has wrecked me and left me what I am! I cannot be so wholly unattractive, so wholly unworthy, since for a time, at any rate, I found favour in your sight. Oh George! for Heaven's sake tell me! did you *never* really love me? Has it been all—all—untrue, a hideous delusion, a chimera of my own brain, a device of the devil to lull me in a slumber of paradise only to awake to a full sense of his tortures?

Oh, if I could die! if I could die! I should rejoice at death, for I have nothing to live for now—nothing; but I cannot die while *she* lives who has dared to come between my heaven and me! I could curse her!

Lord Ennisford winced involuntarily as the last three words fell in a sort of hiss from the woman's lips. Curses were hard words indeed to come near his soft, tender little girl, whose love was shy and pure as the light of a star. But he lacked courage to remonstrate.

“Why not kill me, Bella! that would settle matters comfortably at once!” he said, in a forced, jesting tone.

“Kill you—*you*? I wish I could! I wish with all my soul you were dead! —George! do you know—” her voice fell, then she suddenly went on in a strange, quiet way that made his flesh

creep—it sounded so wicked, so weird, while a cold, steely look stole into her eyes—“I believe I could be happy, quite happy and at peace once more—if I could shut the coffin lid down on your face—your handsome, false face, George!—on those eyes and lips that have lied so foully, even while their looks and kisses brought a frenzy of joy that, like poison berries, allured but to destroy! Oh, if I could be sure!—*sure*—that if dead to me, you were also dead to *her*. But in eternity you will be mine, George—I *will* have you!”

Lord Ennisford did not look delighted or smile at the prospect. In fact he shuddered a little, and, moving to the window, threw up the sash wide, for he felt as if he was stifling. His feelings for this woman, if he had ever had any, were dead, and in lieu of them there lived in his breast a

sense of impotent wrath and disgust that was difficult to conceal. He had known for some time that she was not a dove but a serpent, and he swore at himself, and at the past with its folly, and felt as well a qualm or so about the future.

She cast a furtive look at his face—the beloved face, beloved in her own wild way in spite of its falsity; jealousy, hot love, a supreme hatred, all struggled for mastery in hers as she gazed.

Love—mad and absorbing, but hot and cruel, and wild, prevailed—*pro tempore*.

“George! George! for the love of Heaven don’t look at me like that!—it kills me! Forgive me! I will not do anything! I will not hurt *her*. She may live and be—happy! Only! only!—” and once more she dropped on the floor, grovelling at his feet, and lifted up wild wet eyes, their fire

and wrath all quenched in the passion that flooded her whole being—"say that you will love me a little!—a little!—and let me see you—sometimes!"

It takes not only a perfect man but a strong one to resist a pleading woman, when her prayer is for "love," and Lord Ennisford was an imperfect man and a weak one.

So he raised up his old love, and while her face lay against his breast, he bent and kissed her—on her forehead.

Then he left Bella Grant, rather glad that the flag of truce was flying, and with the comfortable conviction that by avoiding her lips he had preserved his honour and loyalty intact.

Most men, now-a-days, are so addicted to splitting hairs.

CHAPTER II.

LADY ENNISFORD.

*"Soft as the memory of buried love
Pure as the prayer which childhood wafts above
Was she."*

MEANWHILE the pair who have caused so much comment and anguish are comfortably travelling southward in the express. "A boy and a girl," one would say at first glance, but a second glance shows that they are by no means children.

His yellow hair and fair skin make his face look younger, but he is twenty-five; her face, so much darker, looks twenty, but she is only eighteen. The absolute and even startling contrast of the two faces prove to outsiders that there is no

relationship between them of brother and sister.

Yet nothing in dress or manner, not even that nameless self-consciousness that marks most newly-wedded people on their honeymoon, proclaims these two to be bride and bridegroom. But as they are young, evidently *comme il faut*, and travelling alone together, it is natural to conclude they are married. The man is so much handsomer than the woman that, at this age, when "beauty" is so much at a premium; it may be wondered why on earth he fancied her, much more married her.

It is true the man owes you nothing when you say that he looks like the Greek Apollo—for he bears a splendour of life which that straight-nosed young gentleman in marble never had. Yet undeniably, his is the Greek type of beauty, and the

Greek temperament as well, æsthetic, acute, subtle, fickle and dangerous. You would say this if you saw him and learned him in the by-play of life; at present you say nothing of the sort, you simply see and acknowledge his superb beauty. Above the height and bearing a broader girth of chest and shoulders, than belong to average men, he carries his head like a god. Its mass of yellow curls cling close to it and grow low down on his temples. His eyes are of that electric blue that transmit each shade of feeling; his skin of the same quality, white to pallor one moment, the next suffused with blood, the ebb and flow of which is vividly visible beneath its transparent surface. These mark at once the powerful passions and mercurial temperament of George, Lord Ennisford, a man almost as well known

to *habitués* of London as the "People's William."

His features are bold and keenly cut, especially the nose and chin; the mouth is the only feature which fails to minister to the perfection of the face: even this is not faulty in outline; indeed, it is chiselled and shows a gleam of good white teeth—but there is something its expression lacks, or suggests, you scarcely know which—but it is yet an expression that is unsatisfactory. The lips are a little wavering and they might be taunting, or even cruel on provocation; there lurks on them just a vestige of a look of Bella Grant's lips.

Beside the man nestles a little wren—"wren" is the best mode of describing her. Art and nature seem to have combined together to cover her with soft browns—and among the professional

beauties, with Mrs. Langley's exquisite smile, Lady Annerdale's superb stature, and Mrs. East's piquante Hibernian face, dazzling you, Lady Ennisford would be no more noticed than her bird counterpart is in a field of stubble. Her travelling suit is brown *broché* embroidered in brown silk; her hair, guiltless of aureoline or ærine, or any of Truefitt's washes, is simply brown; her eyes are brown, and her skin is brown. Her face a good many call plain, a few call beautiful; the good many wonder that anybody can see any beauty in it, the few exclaim because people *will* call it plain. But, in repose, plain it is—right down, honestly plain; you miss at once the changeful languorous sapphire eyes, the bewitching bewildering beauty that is as intoxicating as wine, as dangerous as poison, and as much to be

avoided as a mad dog—but which you have accepted, in company with mankind in general, as the *beau ideal* of your youth upwards; you miss the magnificent and voluptuous form of a young *Athene*, the rich vitality and luxuriance of temperament that you have connected with the Queens of Beauty. Lady Ennisford is slight and *petite* and quiet, and the only chance of beauty in her face is in its capacity for illumination. Her face is one of those rare and pure faces that is a transparency which needs the inward light to bring out its finest possibilities. Then the eyes of limpid brown kindle and dilate, the full delicate lips quiver with sensibility, the brown cheeks glow with a flush of damask, and under these circumstances—with her *soul* in her face—she is beautiful.


Perhaps it was in a moment like this that

Lord Ennisford, "the lady-killer," fell in love with her, and that he is picturing her now waiting for him as she used to do—with the soft shadow of the patriarchal trees falling on her soul-illuminated face—for suddenly he draws her closer to him.

"My darling!" he whispers, and his eyes seek hers as he speaks.

Lady Ennisford is not looking her best at this moment, and he remarks this fact mentally. Ennisford, the *difficile*, who is the best connoisseur of beauty in town, is in love with his wife, but he could never be so much in love with any woman as not to be perfectly conscious of her looks to their finest shade

As Mrs. Walsingham had said, Lady Ennisford had cried in church, not aloud, of course, but the tears did flow with decided effusion down her cheeks, from some cause



or other ; perhaps from sheer excess of joy that Ennisford was her own. The heroines of novels always look lovely through their tears, the drops glisten like dew on their long curling lashes, and a soft pathetic expression, lends inexpressible charm to their quivering lips.

But Lady Ennisford, as an actual woman, does not look lovely under this lugubrious aspect. Weeping, ever so little, deepens the rings under her eyes, and leaves a little tinge of red about her nose, which is not a beautifier, and Lord Ennisford notes this fact, and is sorry that she cried. Ennisford loves Frances, his wife, because she is Frances, but Frances at her best has more attraction for him and power over him than Frances with her little nose red. He wants her always to look as she did that night under the shadowing trees of the Claverings, when,

for the first time in his life, he was conscious that he loved her better than any other woman, and told her so, and asked her to be his wife.

He had not the slightest idea of doing so five minutes before, although he knew she had caught his fancy ; but, as the liquid brown eyes looked up to his in the clear moonlight, there was that in them—was it womanhood? was it worship?—that made him first feel as if he must snatch her to his heart and hold her there for ever.

For the first time in his life he saw before him his wife, and told her so, not in the thrilling, delicious, romantic strain of the bygone knights, but in that unpoetical, ungrammatical, fast jargon which young England affects, but which sounded in the girl's ears like "airs from Paradise."

Twelve months the engagement had

lasted, and, in spite of temptation greater than St. Kevin was subjected to, Ennisford, for once in his existence of twenty-five years, stuck honourably to his loyalty, and Lady Frances Clavering became Lady Ennisford, the envied of her sex—the rival of Bella Grant.

Lord Ennisford shuts his eyes for a moment to the ill effects of his bride's tears, and pictures once more to himself the little loving and winning ways of the woman he has in his arms. All comes back to him again with a surge of blood that tinges his face hotly. All the hush, the stillness, the exquisite fragrance of that sweet June night, rose laden, the rapt look on her face, the thrill and rush of joy through his own heart.

He sees all—feels all, and, suddenly reopening his electric blue orbs, seeks his wife's face, expecting that it will give back, in re-

ciprocal glance, all he is experiencing at this moment, with his pulses bounding and his blood bubbling to boiling pitch.

But no. Lady Ennisford, with her head drooped, gazes out of the window with a far-off look in her brown eyes, just as if she did not belong to him, and with those marks—those positively ugly marks of tears still upon her face.

The two had been whispering and laughing a short while before, and with her cheeks aglow he had not noticed those tear-traces. He sees them first on her abstracted face in the same instant in which he has become conscious of her lack of reciprocity with his own mood, and immediately his thoroughly mercurial temperament feels a keen rebound.

Many a man, especially a man of Lord Ennisford's peculiar temperament, suffers

reaction from happiness in the first consciousness of actual marriage. No matter how ardently and persistently he has sought his wife, when she is his, when he suddenly realises that his sweet occupation of wooer is gone—his wooing done—when he sees by his side a perhaps not too lovely woman in the strangeness of her wedding garments and the strangeness of her wedding tour, and realises that she, and she only, is to be his till “death do them part,” does not know whether he is happy or not. On the whole, he thinks he is not. And she? No matter how she loves him, she is sure she is not. They two may emerge into a state of bliss—they possibly will, or probably may—but that state of bliss lies right away, right beyond the newness, the strangeness, the partial assimilation of a honeymoon.

Lady Ennisford, gazing rather vacantly

out of the window of the fast flying train, is wondering, like Mrs. Walsingham did, why she cried in church.

Certainly it was for no special cause.

She knew she was going to a home of her own, to a home in which Lord Ennisford would be for ever more by her side. Shy as she was, she felt that once those vows were spoken, once the Gordian knot was tied, she could show him all that was in her heart. The arms that yearned to creep round his neck need never more be kept back from maidenly decorum ; the lips that longed to press his might cling as closely as they would, with nothing to prevent them save the fear of cloying. How could she cry, she wondered, when she had just been married to the dearest fellow, the beginning and the end of life to her ! She worshipped him, and yet she cried. It was folly, ner-

vousness, just because she was too happy, and a little because she was leaving her old life right behind her.

She could never go back to it—never. During those moments that she had knelt by Ennisford's side and taken him "for better, for worse," she had changed as materially from Frances Clavering as if she had been born again, except that the same heart was within her, the heart that Ennisford filled every inch of.

Could she ever love another place like Clavering, with its girdling hills, its threadlike river, its oaks and elms, and its graveyard, where her mother lay buried?

The tears start once more to her eyes, but she dashes them away instantly, averting her head more lest her husband should notice them.


Lord Ennisford is sinking deep into the dumps, when she suddenly turns her face towards him, the air has removed the stains, her eyes are full of light and love, she is again his Frances of the June rose-laden night.

“Tell me again about Highcliffe Towers, Ennisford!” she says, softly, her little red mouth close to his. “Is it a very grand place? Shall I feel as if you are very near to me always in it?”

He is very impressionable and the glamour of his courting days rises up.

He kisses her passionately on brow and lids and lips.

“Sweet! my sweet! if you always look just as you do now, I shall love you so much! so much!” he says, fervently, and Lady Ennisford, forgetting the “if” which is to ensure her so much good and bliss, nestles



her sleek brown head on his shoulder, and feels unutterably content.

And Ennisford is perfectly certain that he is quite happy now, though he had severe doubts of the fact a few moments back, moreover he remains happy till the end of his honeymoon.

Can a man have such tears of anguish shed for him as Bella Grant shed, and know that he has caused them to flow, and yet be happy?


Some men might feel a certain remorse and compunction, but Lord Ennisford can be remarkably comfortable under the circumstances.


True—that not being blessed with very deep seated feelings himself, he does not realise the depth of bitterness and regret which Bella Grant is enduring for him.

CHAPTER III.

COULEUR DE ROSE.


" In the change of years, in the coil of things,
In the clamour and rumour of life to be,
We drink in love at the furthest springs,
Covered with love as a covering tree.
We had grown as gods, as the gods above,
Filled from the heart to the lips with love ;
Held fast in his hand, clothed warm with his wings
Oh love, my love ! had you loved but me."

IGHCLIFFE TOWERS, proud and palatial has belonged to the noble Brambers for generations. It was somewhere about the year 1300 that a gallant soldier, named Marmaduke Bramber, was knighted by Edward I. ; and a brave fellow he was and deserving, for tradition saith that as death gripped him in the thickest of the fight, so he gripped at the English standard, until it rested on his hushed heart.



Highcliffe was a pet habitation for royalty, who had fed right regally under its roof in the good old time, and if there is something a little hard and formal in the square turrets that crown it, a little suggestion of gloom and melancholy in the time-dulled façade of greystone, a tinge of desolation in the mutilated moss-clothed griffins that guard the principal portals, they are counterbalanced by the lavish wealth of colour and fragrance by which they are surrounded. Ivy and woodbine, virginia creeper, and clemantine run with both dark and delicate tracery along the ancient walls; baskets of rare plants hang between the exquisitely carved marble pilasters of the Italian piazza this at a modern innovation; vases laden with rich warm bloom stand on the magnificent wide-spreading undulating lawns; vast flower gardens stretch before the eye, with foun-

tains plashing amidst them. Further on a giant grapery holds out its luxurious clusters, hanging amber and purple in the noontide heat ; on one side lies a glorious forest, on the other, over waving trees and sloping green glades and brakes and hollows, is a full view of the Channel, whose waters sparkle up a thousand prismatic hues under the summer sun ; the same sun scorches the nodding blades of the tall grass down in the adjacent valley, sends long golden bars right through the oaks, and slants, in company with the perfume of a myriad roses, into the breakfast room and on to the table that glitters and gleams with crystal and silver. And at Highcliffe, their permanent home, Lord and Lady Ennisford have elected to spend that supposed to be “ heavenly ” time, when people see through rose-coloured spectacles and feed on Hymettus honey—



the first weeks of married life ; and a sensible election it has been.


Fewer mental specks in one another can be detected under the influence of soft zephyrs and glinting sunlight, among the mysterious whispering of leaves and the soothing prattle of babbling streams, amid flowers and birds and all that tend to make us pleased with ourselves and our fellow creatures, instead of crossing the briny deep for the hackneyed Continental *lune de miel*. Why newly-wedded lovers should run the gauntlet of that most unromantic and trying *mal de mer* in their first hours together is a point difficult to divine ; the only solution of the enigma is that we are all more or less creatures of custom, and fashion is to us a greater autocrat than we care to allow.

To Lady Ennisford this choice for a

honeymoon is absolutely the most delicious. Though she is the daughter of a duke, she has the simple tastes of a peasant girl, and Highcliffe to her is wonderland, and she wanders amidst its glowing beauties, with a strange rapt sense of beatitude, believing that she has reached Eden, where she will dwell with her handsome Adam for ever and ever.

Poor little fool!

The tones of her voice float through the open window into the scented summer twilight, as she sings to her bridegroom. She has not a powerful voice and Italian bravouras she hates; but she warbles little English ballads, with their pretty sentiment and shaky rhythm, and invests them with a pathos and passion that a Diva might envy her. She is pre-eminently a "home bird" and a "home singer," one of those rare



women in whom music lives as an inspiration, only to pour its fullness of melody out upon those she loves. And it is a wonderfully happy face, the handsome blond face of the man who, stretched back in a luxurious lounge, with half-shut dreamy blue eyes and an excellent cigar in his mouth, listens to her; and it is a marvellously blond face that he wears as he lies on the emerald turf in the soft summer gloaming, at the feet of his month old wife.

He seems to bask with the bliss of a child in his new found life. These are perfect moments to him—so perfect indeed in their quality of pure happiness, that they will never again be repeated in after years to him.

For George, Lord Ennisford, lives entirely in his sensations like many other men who have won the name of “ bloated aristocrats,”

and his sensations now are as new as they are pleasant.

The ministry of love, and sunlight, and colour and gloaming, of fragrance and sound, the passion of a Greek temperament, for all that, savours of the beautiful, not one of these are unknown to him. To have each and all of these minister to him, here, on his own domain, is a novel and overwhelming experience; he believes that he has all his life longed for this, he thinks that he has always had an immense yearning for a "home," and that he has seen one in his visions long before he dreamed of a wife, or had looked on Frances' face.

Only twenty-five, and he has a wife and a home. He has a prosperous present and a promise of greater prosperity in the future; heir to a dukedom, good looking, rich, and with the exquisite glamour of

love's young dream throwing a halo over all, he shuts his white lids and smiles to himself in unutterable content, and then opens them again to look at his bride, with a devotion that is a great deal too perfect and beautiful to last.

And if this is all delicious to him, how much more is it so to little Lady Ennisford? She has a creative power of beauty that amounts to positive genius. Had she been born in a garret, a cellar, or a hovel, she would have beautified them *somehow*; she would have touched them with an elegance and a refinement that no other garret, cellar, or hovel has. These lovely grounds of Highcliffe, the old trees, the shrubs, and vines, and flowers, that other hands have planted, seem to wake to a fresh life and bloom under her supervision, as if out of gratitude for her tender care and

intense appreciation of them ; for, strange to say, plants, like children, yield their perfection of sweetness only to the hands that really love them. There is a soul in nature that responds only to the ministry of love, giving back to it a fulness of beauty which, without such sympathy, is never brought out.

She is a daughter of the inland ; her earliest memories are of the domestic, charming but tame, scenery, that is to be found in many of our English shires ; the girdling hills, the thread-like river of Claver-
ing she has been familiar with all her days ; but something responds in her at once to the call of " the sea."

The waves to her are a delight ; from the moment she caught a glimpse of them, smiling at her beyond the waving trees and corn-fields, she seemed to find in them friends.

How much they are her friends she will never know, until far away beyond their call ; in lonely years she hears their monotone sougling in her dreams. Through all this mystic summer, as she stands half dazed in the rose-flushed dawn of a new existence, the heart of the fresh free sea seems as if to beat with her own. Her whole life now is not a dream, but the realisation of a dream of love and peace which, to one of her temperament, amounts at times to an exaltation of ecstasy. She is a neophyte in mind and in years—this girl of eighteen.

She thinks it is nothing but her love for her husband that makes her so happy. She has not the remotest idea that she has an artist's soul, which lends poetry and beauty to everything ; she enjoys even watching the fog creep over the waves, till,

under the sun's keen lances, it splinters into a myriad shreds of silver, that break and curl and fly away to fold the low-lying hills in nebulous film. The world around her is alive with action; everything is just delicious; the very ebb and flow of the sea seems full of repose. How different, she thinks, to that wearisome London life, with its tramp, tramp, and turmoil and crowds, and vanities and vexations, among which she has always dwelt "a thing apart."

Her brown eyes, pure and limpid, like to linger on the long swoop of the sea birds—the oar-like wings of the white gulls cutting the blue ambient, as they sweep on slow and low over the shining waves; the little fishing boats, with men dropping lines and nets over the slippery sides out on the deep waters; the stately vessels, moving out to distant ports; the graceful yachts; even

. the gleam of mackerel, showing their shiny sides through translucent sapphire ; all these things fill Lady Ennisford's simple, tender little heart with pleasure, and form a part of the new and enchanting revelation of life. And in the soft, fragrant dusk, when the sun god has died his diurnal death on his gorgeous couch of crimson and purple and gold, two married lovers sit in the delicious Italian piazza, watching the white-winged vessels pass like phantoms on the sea, while they whisper of their love and their blissful future. She thinks his blue eyes living sapphires as they glow with sudden passion through the gloam ; and he sees her once more as she was when she waited for him under the Clavering trees, with the uplifted looks, and womanhood and worship in her face. In these halcyon hours they neither of them dream that their life can take any

meaning save that of happiness. In a general way they remember the uncertainty of all things in this sublunary sphere. They know that sickness, and death, and misfortunes may come to them as they come to many ; but that a shadow can fall on the perfect sunlight of their wedded love is a possibility that they do not dream of in their philosophy. If anyone suggested it to them they would laugh out at the utter absurdity of the notion !

Whatever else happens, they will live in, and for each other, and for each other only.

Lord Ennisford has forgotten his old existence. The Mrs. Walsinghams and Temples, who were wont to fill up his spare hours amid the feverish routine of a “ man about town’s ” life, have vanished from his eyes and his memory like so many beautiful dreams.

Even Bella Grant, with her wild hungry eyes, her *bizarre* ways, her desperate despair and yearning passion, has no place in his thoughts.

There is only one woman to him now in all the world—one woman who, in spite of her lack of beauty, he thinks as lovely as a star; one woman to whom his future shall be devoted.

It is Lady Ennisford, who has been his wife *just one calendar month*.

They are sitting in the piazza, the night is so still one can almost hear the great heart of nature beat, the soft summery wind comes past in little low swishes, a few pale stars twinkle in the sky, and a young moon, a baby crescent, hangs out its silver light yonder.

Lady Ennisford is not a demonstrative woman, but the hour and the man have

been too much for her. Her slender brown arms have crept round his neck, and her small face, at its best, with her soul illuminating it, lies on his breast.

And Lord Ennisford thinks he is in Heaven.

In the fragrant stillness, they forget the past and the future and live only in the magic present, passing like happy children through the gates of fancy into that fair enchanted land, where "Love" dwells for ever as immortal.

But unsubstantial as everything is, they make at any rate a pretty, shadowy picture, sitting thus, the delicate white robed woman clasped in the man's embrace, her face upturned so as to catch the light in his eyes, as she asks her question.

"George," she whispers, shyly, "have you ever loved anyone else but me?"

And her heart seems to stop beating as she listens for his answer.

There is no hesitation.

“Never !” Lord Ennisford says, emphatically ; “you are my very first love, darling, as you will be my last !”

And he really believes he is speaking the truth.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"We had stood as the sure stars stand, and moved
As the moon moves, loving the world, and seen
Grief collapse as a thing disproved;
Twain "halves" of a perfect heart made fast
Soul to soul, while the years fell past.
Had you loved me, as you have not loved,
Had the chance been with us that has not been."

IT is a professional beauty's boudoir, with
the rigour of "high art" mixed up *pêle
mêle* with things that are warm and glowing.
Pleasant perfumed vapours rise from silver
burners, amid rich draperies of saddest
green and faded yellow. The walls match,
save that they have a dado of giant daffodils.
Oscar Wylde would rejoice in the appoint-
ments of the room. The paintings are more
or less of haggard-eyed, pallor-struck women,
and lank, limp, one-sided men. On the

piano "Grig" holds a prominent position. A terra-cotta pot, with a couple of lean storks desporting themselves on it, is devoted to a tall, bilious-looking sunflower, an æsthetic carpet of *bizarre* and hideous design stares up from the floor, and from a ceiling, painted in lozenge, each one containing an episode in the manifold loves of Zeus, a nautilus lamp is suspended, while through the frosted globe the light falls softly and a little dimly on two women.

They are Mrs. Walsingham and Mrs. Temple.

Both are living representations of a page of *Le Follet*.

Tea gowns of some material filmy as cobweb envelope their pretty forms, a bit of rare lace, fashioned like butterflies' wings, perches on their golden heads, bunches of lilies cluster on their bosoms, spiders in

brilliant shine in their little pink ears, and nestle at their alabaster throats.

“What a dowdy Lady Ennisford looked at the Drawing Room yesterday,” Mrs. Walsingham observes to her bosom friend, slowly sipping at the postprandial coffee; “her train was all awry, her hair dragged off her face like a housemaid’s, her *tout ensemble* too utterly awful.”

“Nevertheless, Ennisford is very devoted,” Mrs. Temple answers, sweetly, though there is malice prepense in her reply, for she knows there have been several warm passages between him and Mrs. Walsingham in other days; “a man is sometimes more fascinated by an ugly woman than a pretty one. It depends, you see so much on opportunity! What do you think I saw him do when he helped her into the carriage after the Drawing Room?”

“Can’t imagine—made a *moue* of disgust behind her back at the figure she cut, I should think.”

“Not a bit of it. I saw him surreptitiously kiss a hand not too well *gantée*. Ah, *ma chère*, he is desperately gone on his own wife, and when a man reaches that stage of fatuous stupidity there is really no accounting for any eccentricity he may commit. Why, he never even looked at you !”

Upon this home thrust little Mrs. Walsingham colours and begins to fan herself violently with a fan of peacocks’ feathers, with big, yellow eyes staring out of it.

“No, nor at you or at Lady Annerdale, or Mrs. Langley, or any of the others he used to admire ; we are all in the same box, you see. How altered he is ; he has lost that delicious *débonnaire* look he

had ; the country rusts people so ; and I thought him quite plain ! ”

“ Did you ! Well, I thought him handsomer than ever, and that marriage seemed to agree with him wonderfully.”

Mrs. Walsingham at this elevates her pencilled brow, screws up her rosebud of a mouth, and shrugs her fair shoulders. “ Wait ! ” she says, with the air of a small Solon in petticoats. “ It won’t last ! I give Lady Ennisford another six months ; after that, *nous verrons !* ”

So Lady Ennisford is to have by this woman’s verdict only six months more of love and happiness. At present she leads a charmed life. Her cup of bliss overflows, and under its influence her little brown face is positively pretty, with the sunshine of her soul illuminating it.

For a couple of months she and her

lord have been in London. Her presentation at Court "on her marriage" has taken place, and, in spite of her train, her *coiffeur*, and her *ensemble*, which the professional beauties cavil at, royalty has smiled on her. She looks so good and pure and simple that her lack of personal attraction is forgotten. Lord Ennisford has shunned all his old haunts, turned a cold shoulder to all his old loves, avoided rigidly another stormy, passionate interview with his cousin, and showed an utter devotion to his wife which is the talk of town. Prophecies as to the duration of such strange but praiseworthy conduct are rife. Will he stick to it?

"No's" preponderate considerably over the "Yes's." As Lord Aylmer had said, "It is not in Ennisford's blood to be steady."

They are back once more at Highcliffe,

lovers still, but with a graver, even tenderer feeling over them than mere love-making. Lady Ennisford is as fragile as if a breath of wind could blow her away to her sister angels in heaven; but her heart beats stronger than ever with two feelings—love for the man she has married and love for the child whose advent is to perfect her life.

How beautifully babies are born in novels always! Little Algernon and little Rosamond glide so gracefully on the human scene, not incommoding their pretty mammas with a single wrinkle or crumple in existence.

Not thus, however, are the actual Johnnies and Janies born.

Little Lord Chester was an absolute poem till he came, but he ceased to be one to his father from the moment he

first tried the strength of his little lungs. Lord Ennisford—about whom, by the way, is a deal of indolent, Sybaritical self-indulgence, had his “mystic summer,” like that of which a poet father sings.

It was something too delicious to talk of the coming child, stretched comfortably on the cool, green, velvety sward at the feet of its mother in the twilight and the starlight, with the subtle fragrance of a myriad flowers pervading their senses, and the Channel sweeping before them like a phantom sea.

Somehow the stars had seemed to shine with a holier, tenderer radiance, the roses had sighed out greater sweetness, the water had murmured more gladly in these moments to both man and wife.

But from the hour the little grandson of a duke appeared on the arena of life

he seemed to shut everything ideal or romantic out of sight.

It is dreadful heresy to utter about a "first baby," and young mothers as they read will frown, but it is the first baby that is the real disorganizer, a baker's dozen afterwards do not make such a frightful revolution in the house as the one that comes first. Many wedded couples who have lived to find the very life of their life in the first child, look back with unpleasant memory on the first twelve months of its existence.

The mother, overweighted with anxiety and affection, and ridiculously helpless and foolish, lives in constant dread lest the flickering life she holds so closely, yet so tremulously, will go out like the snuff of a candle.

She adores her baby to an absurd

adoration, but she has not the very faintest idea how to take care of it, or any conception what to do with it.

Every mother of a family, every prim old spinster, who has nephews and nieces by the score, who comes to "welcome the little stranger" and to discover whether its little snub nose is a paternal or maternal heritage; or whether its small, red, puckered-up face shows any resemblance to its grandfather's apoplectic visage, has her own infallible remedy for the unlucky infant's croup or convulsions, colic and teeth; till, with the administration of all by the bewildered and distracted parent, the marvel is that the baby manages to exist at all.

Lady Ennisford is a woman who, unlike most aristocrats, persists in looking after the heir of the Brambers herself—and

turns a deaf ear to the suggestions of her friends on the advisability of day nurseries and night nurseries—where children can indulge their proclivities for noise, without disturbing the tympanums of grown ups' ears.


She loves to hear, as well as to know, that God has given her a living child, and little Chester does not disappoint her, for he screams away the first few months with a pertinacity that is fortunately rare. He seems to have not only the germ of a lachrymose disposition, but is in actual fright at the new world in which he finds himself.

According to the tenets of ideality and poetry, he ought to be like his father, a large, fair, serene-eyed boy, born out of musing hours and moonlit rambles. In reality he is far from serene, and is acutely organised ;

he is very tiny, timid, and tearful, and Mrs. Brown, the portly head nurse, imparts, in a careful whisper to her assistant, Mary Ann, that "His Lordship is a most uncomfortable child."

To Lady Ennisford he is a cherub—a little lump of perfection. Whether he screams or whether he crows she fancies they are warblings of the angelic choir, nevertheless, half the time she does not know what to do for him. Long before she can manage to hold him tight in her slender arms without letting him drop on the floor, her great wistful brown eyes follow the obese proportions of the nurse from hour to hour to learn what she does with "baby," and when at last nature overpowers her prudence, and she rashly insists on taking charge of him herself—her fear lest he should come to

grief gives the little one a feeling of being in insecure hands, and of course he screams louder than ever. Nothing can exceed Lord Ennisford's devotion for the first week of his son's existence. The most fickle of butterflies, and the biggest flirt in town, as Mrs. Walsingham called him, spends his whole time with his wife; his strong arms carry her up and down stairs; he reads to her out of their favourite book, and gazes on her with eyes through which the passionate fervour of the honeymoon shines out. Never has she had him so entirely to herself as now—never has he been so gentle, so unselfish, so tender. No matter what happens, she has this period to look back on with unmarred sensations of content. Maybe, some day, if wrong and trouble come to her, these hours will be green oases in life's desert,



landmarks in memory which will soften resentment into regret.

A little later, Lord Ennisford makes a hurried visit to London. The Duke wants him on business, and, as a matter of consequence, he runs against old pals at the clubs, and encounters almost at each step pretty women, with whose smiles he is familiar, and whose liquid voices are only too ready to welcome him back among his old haunts. He knows that Frances is absorbed in baby, and will not miss him "just yet." There are new pieces at the theatres, Belinda Vavasour is quite a hit in *Olivette*, and Florence Darcy has fired the London world by her toilette and acting in *Patience*, while he has been rustivating among sylvan shades; and another professional beauty—a young and unmarried one, a Transatlantic belle—

has cropped up to be criticised, and so on.

When he returns to Highcliffe he somehow realises that those weeks at home, just after little Chester's birth, bridged the old life and the new, and he also realises—a little aghast at his discovery—that the old life, that seemed so sweet and precious, has in a manner lost some of its charm. He is in fact, *disillusioné* with the joys of marital existence, and as a shrill scream smites his sensitive ear, he is conscious of a sense of unreasonable irritation. No soft, brown-eyed, delicate girl, with a tender brown face, awaits his arrival, with slender arms, eager to slip round his neck; no sweet trill of greeting floats to him through the open windows on this bland October day. So he strides into the hall, a frown on his

brow and a shadow on his handsome blue eyes.

All these pleasant things are evidently of the past, he thinks; of course, Frances is with her baby—and with her baby she will stay. She wants to be with her husband, whom she has not seen for so many days, but little Chester, who is fickle and capricious—(perhaps, like the other Brambers, it is not in his blood to be steady)—has taken an aversion to being pillowed on the ample bosom of Mrs. Brown, and so his mother, who is his slave, cannot leave him.

By-and-by, when the *tête-à-tête* dinner is over, Lord Ennisford is enticed up to the nursery to see how baby has grown in the period of a week, and how strikingly his resemblance to his father is on the increase; and repents the rashness, that in a weak

moment led him up three pairs of stairs, when he finds himself called upon at once to assist in wooing back peace, to carry the young autocrat, to pat his tiny back, and to fulfil to the best of his ability the duties of a subordinate nurse.

It gradually but surely dawns upon him that the offspring he has desired, and of whom he has talked by the hour in the twilight and starlight, is a minute but mighty tyrant, who rules Highcliffe and manages to make all its inmates decidedly uncomfortable, if not unhappy, at least two-thirds of the time, for Lady Ennisford is very young and weak and foolish, and her motherhood has overpowered her. She is utterly possessed of her new responsibility; she is, in fact, so absolutely absorbed by the child that she has nothing left for herself, or thought of

anything else. Her every idea is wrapped up in the pink and white querulous atom of humanity that lies in her lap, making grotesque grimaces, which to her are the perfection of loveliness ; and when Lord Ennisford returns from what are now frequent visits to town, she scarcely comprehends the gist of his gossip. She has never, in fact, really comprehended the world of London well ; but in earlier days she used to like to hear her husband tell her about it, simply because it was the world in which *he* had lived so much. But somehow the theatres and Hurlingham, the fashionable parties, the feverish dissipation, seem distant and even myths to her. She cares nothing for town, save for the park, and even that cannot vie in her eyes with the delicious cool green shades and sunlit bits that Highcliffe shows.

And Lady Ennisford does not feel the least interested in the new professional beauty. She has a foolish horror of women being held up to public view, and subjected to public admiration and criticism. Her notions are a little obsolete perhaps, but the Duke and Duchess of Sandowne are good simple folks, with none of the "go ahead" sentiments and ways of their brother and sister aristocrats, and their daughters have been brought up as carefully and plainly as the offspring of a country parson.

Lady Ennisford has even lost interest in the new opera. Little Chester's feeble attempt at laughing and crowing beat Rossini's and Gounod's music to fits, and Lord Ennisford has the mortification of seeing that his wife does not often hear what he is saying, and feels proportionately

injured. And this is Frances—Frances, who for more than a twelvemonth was his adoring slave, to whom his every look and love were sources of intense interest, to whom his will was an ukase, and to whom he was all in all!

Only to think that a scrap, an atom, should have ousted him out of his place in her heart! He had really cared for his wife, but he had also all along cared dearly for—himself; and *par conséquence* his thoughts begin to revert to his own beloved self as being a neglected, ill-used individual. Still, it has not occurred to him to see other consolations, *not yet!*

The evil deepens instead of ameliorating, however. Little Chester's first tooth heralds nights and days of anxiety and wailing, and it comes to pass that at last

Lord Ennisford rather dreads crossing the threshold of his once paradisiacal home. As has been said before, his temperament is very epicurean, he loves peace and pleasantness, he loves all that panders to his own pleasure, and when that element in his life goes out of it with the suddenness of a "jack in the box," he feels irritated and discontented—worse, he feels an irresistible yearning for some other phase of existence, some existence in which he will again be the primary object in some woman's life. Indolence of nature might keep him satisfied with his wife's devotion, at any rate, for the present; but as he cannot have *that*, he must seek it from some other woman.

As for the right or the wrong of the thing, that never enters his head. Morality is an obsolete virtue in this nineteenth

century, and Lord Ennisford has never been a Bayard ; he has even been a young Don Juan ; and though his marriage has cleansed his ways for a while, he is unluckily too apt to be a backslider, with the finger of pleasure beckoning him on the broad path, and with a lovely *riante* face alluring him.

Instead of the quick step, the light form, the sweet loving smile he was used to see, he finds a woman, pale and wan and spiritless, her brown hair ruffled and untidy, her brown eyes red with tears, her dress neglected, her whole aspect in lieu of being *soigné*, the “dowd” that Mrs. Wallingham had cavilled at.

She bends over a tiny cot and listens in terror, lest every sound betokens death in the child that lies with closed lids and flickering pulse before her.

And even the father experiences a qualm as he gazes down on the little creature, who holds his mother's heart strings in his puny grasp.

"If I only knew what to do," wails poor Lady Ennisford, piteously, the great drops plashing down her pallid cheeks. "No one tells me the right thing that ought to be done at once! The Duchess says one thing; she is, you know, a homeopathist. My mother writes another just the opposite, for she is a hydropathist. The vicar's wife says if I do either for baby it will be his death, for she is an allopathist. I try to forget all and follow Dr. Blendon's instruction strictly; but oh, George! he is dying!—I know he is!—what *shall* I do?"

Lord Ennisford feels a great rush of love and pity for the woman, almost a child

herself, as he looks down on her pleading mouth, her pitiful eyes, and for a while he is as anxious to preserve the life of his son and heir as she is.

He does not answer her for a minute ; he is evidently reflecting ; then a white wave surges over his face, and he says in a low voice :

“ I know !—let us send for—Bella Grant.”



CHAPTER V.

PRESCIENCE.

"There is in all this cold and heartless work no power
Of deep, strong, deathless love, like that within
A mother's heart."

B*ELLA GRANT!*
Lady Ennisford shuts her eyes a moment, and her heart seems to stop beating, as her husband utters that name, and she feels a sickening sensation, while a shadow flits over her face, which Lord Ennisford notes at once.

She cannot quite explain to herself why she has such a dread to Bella Grant's coming, such an aversion to Bella herself. She tries to think of her pleasantly as Ennisford's cousin. She has sisters herself, but they are all married, and she not only

needs but she is dying for the help and advice of some woman, older, stronger and wiser than herself. Her nineteen years have not brought her nearly enough strength and experience to meet her requirements in her present sore need. She wishes she was half a century, and had had a score of children, so that she might be *au fait* in the case of "Baby" now.

The awful responsibility of motherhood seems to be a burden which she lacks the strength to bear longer yet, in all the world—such a big world as it is, too, this Bella Grant, of whom she has an instinctive fear and dislike, seems the only one who can come to her aid.

She does her best to call up all the magnanimous and generous feelings in her nature, and to remember that it is but right that they should be kind and hos-

pitiable to so near a relative, and a woman whom Ennisford has not hidden from her is as devoted to him as though he were her brother.

Since the child's birth, Lord Ennisford has several times reverted to Bella's affection for him (Platonic affection, of course), on purpose, perhaps, to pave the way, should Bella, strong of will, persistent and violent tempered, assert her desire to come to Highcliffe.

Lady Ennisford bends closer over the infant, and tears like blinding rain drip on to his little waxen face. How small it is! like a tiny white rose petal, to her thinking.

Somehow her husband's proposition has made her more miserable and nervous than she was before.

"Here!" she thinks, "here—living in this house—her home here as well as mine!

That look she gave me in the church haunts me still—I shall never forget it. If she were ever to look like that here I could not bear it!” and then she looks up at her husband with a strange, scared glance, a glance before which Lord Ennisford quails just a little.


Conscience makes cowards of us all, and the trouble that sweeps out of his wife’s limpid brown eyes makes him feel just as if she were conscious how much he is keeping back from her about Bella!

Yet he is sure that she is as ignorant as a new-born babe of his sins of the past—that she looks upon him in her pure, guileless nature as a Paladin whose life has no moments that must be carefully kept dark from the woman he has taken till death do them part.

In the first days, during the delightful

honeymoon, he had actually contemplated telling his bride all about himself—even about Bella's vehement passion for himself, but he could not bring his moral courage up to such a pitch, and finally had decided that it would be wrong, even wicked, to sully the virgin pages of Frances's simple mind by such a tale.

For the same reason he had strenuously concealed from her the fact that Bella wrote him (always to the club, the address that is such a convenient but vile safeguard to married Lotharios now-a-days) letters filled with mad vows—the most passionate terms of endearment that a woman with a fierce, untamed, ill-regulated nature could pen. He was quite accustomed to her stormy style of correspondence ; no extravagance of sentiment was a phase unknown to him ; for he had had a surfeit of such tropical



effusions during the three years he and she had been lovers ; and he knew how to take them—that is to say, that his mind, habituated to women whose modesty was their least attraction, made allowance for what would have shocked Lady Ennisford into fits and have shaken her faith in her sex to an appalling degree.

Why should he initiate her simple soul to such things ? he asked himself, winding up with the conclusion that the truth is not to be spoken at all times.

It was so that he took his first step away from Frances, as every man or woman does who makes the most intimate confidence of another life his or her own in secret, hiding that secret from the wedded mate as from one who has neither right nor interest in the matter.

The secret in itself may not be wrong,

but its influences all run in the wrong direction, and the subterfuges, the deceit, the falsehood build up the barrier and make the sin and the unhappiness.

We have not to live many years before we find out to our cost that reserve of any kind between husband and wife is a fiend, a total exterminator of every hope of peace and happiness.

Lord Ennisford, to do him justice, had not wanted Bella's letters. That is to say, not at first; for twelve months they had vexed him, bored him to distraction, and given him a feeling of insecurity and discomfort. All her old wild longing just to look on his face had come with his absence back to her, and with that longing pride, revenge, malice and all uncharitableness had completely knocked under.

She pleaded for his forgiveness for her

wicked threats. She was mad when she breathed them, she wrote mad with a desperate impotent sense of rebellion against a marriage which had crushed her heart, and made of her—a castaway—a creature whom her sex must scorn and revile. And oh! life was so desolate, *so* desolate!—so empty, so utterly worthless without *him*! For his dear sake she could even love his wife. She did not wish to trouble him with her presence: he was tired of her—perchance he hated her! as men hate those whom they have cruelly wronged—but, her soul hungered and thirsted, yearned, sickened to look upon him just once again!—and so on. Letters in this strain were, of course, unacceptable to the man while his life was complete, while the days flew by in a halcyon dream of satisfied content and bliss.

The very presence of a third person, an outsider, at Highcliffe would have been an absolute nuisance—even a dire infliction ; but now this was changed. He felt as if he would gladly welcome anybody who would share his wife's domestic cares and give her back to him as she was.

He does not acknowledge to himself—with that utter self-delusion that comes so easily to many men—that there was something in Bella Grant's fervid letters that appealed to him, gratified him, soothed him. He does not guess himself how inexpressibly sweet to his heart the voice of flattery and the words of worship are. Bella idolises him, he has cast her off like a poor withered blossom, like a worn-out, faded glove—he has neglected her, and yet she has never forgotten him. She has clung to his memory, and

bowed down in servile adoration at his feet. Deaf and dumb to others, hard as wood or stone to all men, she is malleable as wax, warm as a tropical clime, lavish as a true Galliarde to him.

There are men and *men*. To some such self-abnegatory passion may be distasteful, even repellent. To others, and to those of Lord Ennisford's temperament especially, it is a poisonous incense, intoxicating, subtle, pleasant, and nearly always irresistible. Bella is longing, praying, to be let to love him and see him, even as a bright particular star. The more he thinks of this, the more it becomes a desire with him that Bella should come. Lady Ennisford takes up in her own trembling fingers the tiny, wasted hand of her little one; it has grown so tiny, *so* tiny! Could a child with *such* a hand *live*? and the hot

tears well once more. "He is past hope! he is dying!" her agonised heart cries. "What does it matter to her *who* comes or who goes! Bella Grant may know something that will do baby good!"

"Send for Miss Grant, Ennisford," she cries, suddenly, "she hates *me*, I feel it! but if she does baby good, I shall love *her*. Send at once!"

"That's right, my darling. Bella is wonderfully practical and useful—and, besides, she will take the nursing off your hands and give you back to me. It is so long, so long, since I have had my pet's society for five minutes to myself! I love this little chap dearly, but I want his mother as my very own again!"

And Lord Ennisford stoops and kisses his wife's trembling lips with fervour, smiling himself a little as he does so. She

shudders involuntarily, not at his kiss—his kiss sends even now a sweet thrill through her frame—but because, as she feels it, she sees Bella Grant's face with that dreadful look on it again.

She is weak and overwrought, and it is but a natural sequence that she should see visions, and this one falls on her like the preliminary chill before a gathering storm, like the cold prescience of evil to come.



CHAPTER VI.

THE SERPENT ON THE HEARTH.

“We have scotched the snake—not killed it;
She'll close and be herself—whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.”

“**D**EAR BELLA, you are wanted. The boy is ill and Lady Ennisford will be the better for your help in nursing—write at once what train you can take.

“ENNISFORD.”

This is the note, more command than request, that finds its way into the room where Bella Grant poured out the vials of her passion and grief now nearly two years ago. The room has remained in *statu quo*. The basket, heaped over with garments for the poor, still keeps its

prominent position by the window—no added article of furniture or *virtu*, relieves the severe aspect of the chamber, unless it be a large coloured photograph of Lord Ennisford in the uniform of one the Household regiments, that in an elaborately carved gilt frame hangs on the wall—a splendid contrast to all upon which it looks down. It is placed, not by accident but by design, exactly opposite the bed, so that Bella's eyes may rest on it at first waking, and upon whom its steadfast gaze appears to be fixed. But beside this one, to her, priceless possession—nought is changed a whit, and no more is the inmate of the bare uncomfortable chamber.

It is quite a study in human nature to watch the effect of the hurried, ill-written note upon Bella, as she sits alone, conscious of nothing but its imperious contents

and of her own sensations. She reads it—kisses it, re-reads it and kisses it again; then going to the little ivory-box that still retains its place on the ancient marqueterie bureau, she unlocks it and snatches from it the injured likeness of her cousin, which she had stamped on and raved over on his wedding-day.

“So! you cannot live without me! my darling—my love!” she murmurs, half aloud; “I knew you couldn’t! I *felt* you couldn’t! For nearly two years I have dragged on this wretched, loveless, lonely existence. *How*, God knows! But no more! thank Heaven, no more! If I once enter Highcliffe, I’ll never leave it again, *never*! I’ll kill *her* first!” and the old evil look creeps over every feature and darkens the whole of her face.

“She! a pale, plain spiritless fool! Ah,

what is there in her to satisfy *him*. If he has not found this out already, I'll help him to learn the fact! You have had your day, my Lady Ennisford, but it has been a brief one with a whole—whole lifetime nearly to come after. But how long! how horribly long that day has seemed to me as I have sat here measuring my agony by every second, eating out my heart in impotent anger and vain regret, knowing that another woman has been with him, hers the right to every caress, for one of which my soul yearns, and my heart craves until I feel well-nigh crazed! All this time *she* has been blest and happy, for she has had *him*! now *my* turn has come! Surely! Surely!"

She speaks these words very slowly as she twists a long heavy black coil of hair round her finger; and as she holds the


mutilated photograph in her other hand, her grey eyes gleam and scintillate and devour the portrait that hangs on the wall.

Presently she rises, and going over to the toilette glass, she stares hard at her own reflection.

What a reflection it is, a pale face, more pallid still from its crown of ebon tresses; a pair of burning eyes, out of which a baseness of love, a cruel passion shine; a mouth which, in spite of thin lips, is full of materialism, a heavy brow, and over every feature a hard defiant look. But as she gazes at herself, a change seems to come over the spirit of her dream.

"I wonder if I am much altered!" she says, in an audible whisper; "I wonder how I shall look to him!"

And as she wonders, quite a tender smile flits over her mouth, softening her



countenance curiously. "Ennisford always said I was good-looking to him! How often he has laid at my feet, with his bonny blue eyes looking up into mine, his hands clasping my own. Ah! I can hear him say now, "I love you, Bella! only *you*! only *you*!"

But it wasn't true! it was only to steal from me my crown of glory—it was only to wreck a human soul for the selfish pleasure of a few fleeting hours. He is a traitor! a traitor! liar! Traitor or liar, he is, God forgive me, everything to me! If I have grown uglier it is the burthen he has laid upon me that has done it. Happiness could make me beautiful! I am pretty now!" she cries, bending close to the mirror, "quite pretty at this moment, as I think how soon I shall be with him again!" and she smiles complacently.

She says the truth, too, for the face she sees sparkles with a certain *bizarre* beauty. The sudden excitement ; the reaction from utter hopelessness to newborn hope caused by her old lover's note, brings a glow to her sallow cheek, a feverishly bright light to her hard, grey eyes, an illumination, in fact, to her entire countenance, that kindles momentarily its harshness and haggardness into a queer, fitful sort of charm ; and while she believes that it is trouble that has stolen away her attractions from her, she quite forgets that if it is so, half that trouble is unsanctified, that the low, brooding storm of passion has never been really lulled ; that envy, malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness have lived and still live in her heart with a vitality that is terrible to herself and to the objects of them. Perchance, who knows, that this woman was meant for better

things, and fate has been her enemy and made her what she is? If she had been a wife and a mother she might have had a different face and a different character. She is one who would love whatever was her own with that savage passionate love that appertains to all animal temperaments, simply because it was her own. Probably, if she had come into possession of a woman's common heritage, the great drawn lines round her mouth would have been curves, and bends, and dimples; the hungry, furtive eyes might have been content and serene. But now her nature is quite at issue with her fate. She thinks that fate has bitterly deprived her of everything, and this conviction makes her look with hatred on most women, more especially on Lady Ennisford, whom she really believes has come in some unlawful way into possession of the joy

that really belonged to her! For Bella's religious and social notions are as *bizarre* as herself. She has not, for nearly two years been so near that joy as she is at this moment, while she persuades herself that Lord Ennisford loves her still and wants her; the very thought of this brings her nearer to beauty than she has ever been before. It is difficult for any woman, even the plainest, to believe herself wholly unattractive, and it is instinctive in all women the longing to be thought beautiful. Yet, since Lord Ennisford married, Bella has thought nothing about herself; it has seemed to her that without *him* life was valueless, and nothing it contained worthy of a thought.

"I am really handsomer than *she* is!" she cries, excitedly, as she pushes back her hair from her brow, and marks the hot blood

glowing on her cheek, the triumphant flash in her eye. "That is not saying much, however, for he chose the ugliest girl he knew. If George could see me at this moment he would love me again—love me as I love him! My darling! my darling! to think that after all you have not forgotten me; that you want me again."

Poor thing! after so long an absence she exaggerates the feeling that has prompted Lord Ennisford's words, and deepens the meaning of them with the intensity of her own emotions.

Lord Ennisford, writing from out of the shadow of his life, impatient, restless, tired out, thinks only he would like a decided change in the domestic routine of Highcliffe, and that no one can so well bring it about, and give his wife's society back to him, as Bella, all of course through her love for him. It

never occurs to him that she will exaggerate his letter into "sentiment," and let it delude her into the hope that he and she can resume their old relations again.

Within twelve hours from the receipt of his missive she is on her way to Highcliffe. Lord Ennisford, having nothing to do, for he is an indolent man by nature, meets her at the station, and with the very first tone of his voice a chill of disappointment falls upon her.

Of course his handsome face brightens up, for he is glad to see her—very glad ; but there is such a decidedly Platonic look in his blue eyes, and such a 'Platonic sound in his voice that they seem to strike from her at once the dream of love and triumph in which she had wickedly revelled in during her journey.

After all, it is Lady Ennisford and the


boy every moment; they are his Lares and Penates, and it never enters his brain that each time he mentions them he raises up a tempest in his companion's breast which is easier to raise than to quell.

She listens with bitter chagrin, and in her swift revulsion of feeling the old fury of dislike to Lady Ennisford crops up hotly and strongly in her heart. Just for an instant, as they bowl along a firm level road in a handsome phaeton, behind a pair of thorough-breds, it seems to her that she *must* burst into the old threats and passionate invectives with which she had regaled him on the news of his approaching marriage—but a quick consciousness of the consequences, the memory of the two last hateful years she has gone through, united to the strong will that seldom fails her, save when overwhelmed by supreme passion, prevent an

outbreak ; though the flood of tears and torrents of reproach and taunts that struggle within her, keep her dumb.

“I don’t know why, Bella ! but, somehow, I feel that you will be the saving of the boy. You remember how splendidly you nursed me through that fever I caught at Rome. If it hadn’t been for you I should have gone to Kingdom Come, there and then !” and with this remembrance vibrates the first soft tone in his voice, and it goes through her from head to foot.

“I shall do my best for him, George, you know that !” she answers. “I seem to love him already !” and her mouth trembles as she speaks, and while he glances at her gratefully they drive quickly up a magnificent avenue, with century-old trees meeting overhead to the door. Highcliffe, grand and imperial,



massed in beauty and bloom, smiles down on them, and Bella starts and bites her nether lip hard.

“And so this is his home, and—hers,” she thinks, every antagonistic feeling bristling up in her breast. At this moment she hates the man who has not chosen her for his Eve, in this sweet earthly Paradise, and feels as if she could almost murder him. For the love of some women is indeed a fearful thing.

“You will excuse Lady Ennisford not coming down to welcome you, Bella!” he says with a certain deprecation in his manner, for he is not anxious to add fuel to the fire which he see blazing in her grey eyes, and she notes that he always says—*Lady Ennisford*. Is it because he has grown cold and formal towards his wife? Bella would fain lay this flattering unction

to her soul, but she is no fool—knave, rather.

“He does it because he wishes to draw a line of reserve between Lady Ennisford and the woman who is——” She shudders and flushes, then suddenly schools her features into a proper expression of intense sympathy.

She is a hateful woman, this Bella Grant—my readers, but she is a type of a good many women about.

“She asked me to take you directly you came to her. She is with the boy. She will not leave him for a moment, not even for *me*,” he adds, in a decided tone of injury.

Bella stoops and gathers up her wraps in her arms really to hide a smile of satisfaction as she listens. Then she follows him into the hall. It is growing dusk, and no one is by.

Halting before him, she stands with her figure drawn up, her head thrown back, and a pair of grey eyes upturned with a meek, beseeching look.

Lord Ennisford cannot help but mark their expression, but wilfully misunderstanding her, he says, simply but kindly,

“Tired, Bella?”

“No!” she answers. “George! we have not met for nearly two years. Are we to meet as strangers now?”

For the life of him he cannot help likening her in a queer sort of way to Mephistopheles. A little grain of distaste creeps over him, but he is a weak man, is Lord Ennisford, especially where women are concerned.

He bends down and drops a chaste salute on his guest's high forehead, but it does not satisfy her.

“ Kiss me on my lips, George ! it will seal our—friendship.”

Friendship—It is a quiet, pleasant-sounding word, and he revives at once.

After all, a kiss more or less cannot do any one much injury, and in this instance it may smooth down difficulties which he had not contemplated, when he wrote to this cast off love of his to come and live under the same roof as his wife. So he stoops once more, and put his lips to Bella's, and for an instant she stands with her eyes closed, dazed, bewildered, then she draws a long, deep breath.

“ I am ready to follow you now,” she says, in her abrupt *bizarre* fashion, and in the next instant, they enter side by side a half-darkened room.

Here she sees a little girlish figure bowed over a child, that lies on her knee. Bella


knows of course that she is Lady Ennisford, though she does not bear much resemblance to her whom she had known as Lady Frances Clavering. These two have never met since that day when Bella threw a look of withering hate at her rival, and her rival caught that look. She certainly was not prepared for the change, and at the very first glance she feels satisfied that personal advantages are on her own side. And nine out of ten would agree with her.

It is a physiological study, the meeting of these two women. In every point they are as dissimilar as the north and south poles, neither of them either are what is understood by the term of a "woman of the world."

Lady Ennisford, crude and young, and naturally simple, and unsophisticated, is really quite a novice in such knowledge. And

Bella is of too coarse a mould to have learnt the finesse of really refined women. Both, in fact, are thorough ignoramuses in the diplomacy of daily intercourse, and one can see that they are very unequally matched at the first *coup d'œil*.

Lady Ennisford, only nineteen, looks older than Bella does at thirty, for the lovely freshness of girlhood has left her. Beauty, such as men go mad over, has never been hers, excepting in strange, subtle evanescent gleams, and of them the very last ray seems to have gone out, leaving her faded before her time. She is fearfully thin—thin to painfulness; and her great brown eyes, erstwhile so soft and tender, but which anxious days and sleepless nights have dilated into unusual size, are full of a wistful, asking gaze, like that of a dumb animal in its appeal for help.



To Bella Lady Ennisford looks a dreadful wreck. And with this thought, pleasing of course to her, her own face takes a better and gentler expression. Gentler, perhaps, because she knows Lord Ennisford is looking at her.

Who knows but he is mentally comparing the woman he has taken and the woman he has flung away. Who knows but he is mourning in sackcloth and ashes the folly of his choice! Bella thinks with a bright colour sweeping over her face, which to discriminating eyes, even in its smiling, is not a face to be trusted. Strong physical and mental power is conspicuous on the tall figure, in the exuberance of physique, and in the head, which Lavater would have found ample food for study. Concentration of will, or, as some might call it, obstinacy or even doggedness, shines out

of the fixed grey eyes, but the smile that curves the corner of the thin lips downward are dangerous, and though the voice is toned down, soft and low, there vibrates faintly on an acute ear that peculiar quality that can rise to clarion cries of rage and passion, or send out low cruel taunts that sting like nettles.

Bella is on her good behaviour now, however, a wolf in sheep's clothing, as she lays her cat's claws gently in the little wasted palm of her rival.

"It is very good of you to have come to us at once," Lady Ennisford says, in a whisper. "Do look at baby, do you think he can live?"

"Live, of *course* he'll live," cries Bella, in a sham tone of brightness and hopefulness, which, however, does excellent duty for a genuine one. Then she stoops and kisses

the child for its father's sake, and even a little for its own.

"If he was only mine! *my* child and his!" she thinks, with a savage rush of passion and greed in her mind, "how I should idolize him!"

And it is the truth, for, in spite of her sinful ways and adamant nature, she has a curious liking for children, and women with such a feeling strong in them make superb nurses; her very knack of handling him, her very touch appears to sooth the young heir of the Brambers at once.

"It's only his teeth, you know, poor little darling! Directly they make their appearance he will be as jolly as ever!" she says, in an electric tone, which seems to be felt even by the child. He opens his big blue eyes wide, and resembles his father to such a degree that once more Bella

snatches him in her arms and rains down kisses on his wee face. For weeks he has scarcely opened his lids without a little wail, but something—a force—a vitality in his new nurse seems to impart strength to his feeble little pulse, and with a faint smile flickering over his face, he lies staring at her.

“Bella has positively magnetised him,” Lord Ennisford remarks, with a low laugh. “See, Frances, he has quite a healthy pink colour, and his eyes are bright and as blue as sapphires. He’ll soon be well, I’ll lay a wager!”

“Please God! please God!” the mother murmurs, fervently; “no one can love him as I do, yet I have not been able to calm him as you seem to do, Miss Grant!”

“You are not strong, and you have lost your nerve perhaps,” Bella says, with a

glance at her *vis-à-vis* which has a *souçon* of contempt in it. "I am very strong, have no nerves to speak of, so can devote all my energies to my charge, you see!"

Lady Ennisford looks up at her admiringly and gratefully.

"He is better already I think, George, we nearly gave him up yesterday!"

"Did you? but that was foolish," is the hard, unsympathetic answer; then Bella addresses the child softly:

"You'll live my little man! you'll live, either to enjoy life, or to wish you had never been born! See! he has fallen asleep quite quietly," and she puts him down on the bed and stares at his mother with undisguised surprise and criticism wrote on her features.

"And I have not even taken off your bonnet or taken you to your room, when


you must be so tired and hungry after your journey," Lady Ennisford says, self reproachfully. "Forgive me, Miss Grant, it is so hard to think of anything but baby, now that he is so ill."

"For goodness' sake don't call her *Miss Grant*, Frances! She is 'Bella,' you know!" Lord Ennisford cries, abruptly. He is feeling quite softly towards his old love, and has drawn comparisons even between the two women's faces before him, that have not been in his wife's favour. "Don't you see, she won't feel at home if you are so formal."

"I am very glad you have come, Bella, and hope you will stay at Highcliffe as long as you like," Lady Ennisford says, in her sweet, courteous little way.

"Thank you!" Bella replies, curtly.

But her hostess does not mind, she is so glad that the boy is better, that nothing and



nobody can drive away her delicious hope and joy that fill her heart.

“Yes, Bella! your presence has been magical, and we owe you a debt of gratitude we can never repay if you give us back that little chap from the jaws of death,” Lord Ennisford says, as his wife has moved a few steps away.


“You owe me another debt! a debt you shall pay some day, Ennisford,” Bella whispers back, almost fiercely, and once more her grey eyes gleam and devour the fair handsome face of the man for whom she has a mad, reckless, selfish love.

And he, as he meets her glance, instead of rebuking her, smiles, a smile of gratification at that incense to his vanity which Bella’s glance is—an incense which he has missed at Highcliffe, and without which he does not care to live.

CHAPTER VII.

POUR Y PARVENIR.

"I have put my days and dreams out of mind,
Days that are over and dreams that are done,
Though we seek life through we shall surely find
There are none of them dear to us now—not one!"

HEN the evening is over, the lights turned down in Highcliffe, and Lady Ennisford gone to seek the rest she so much needs after days and nights of watching and wailing, Bella, with the door of the room assigned to her a little ajar, sits and thinks everything over. Her elbow rests on the tastefully-arranged toilet-table, and abounding in all manner of elegant and costly knick-knackeries, and her eyes are turned towards the looking-glass. She is full of vanity, but she is not admiring her-

self at this moment, for her thoughts are absorbed in "the situation."

She is perfectly capable of reviewing it in an occult fashion. In a desultory sort of way, she has really studied a good deal, and thought even more. If her passions are ungovernable, not so is her mind. Through nearly all her thirty years she has studied, in a disjointed manner, perhaps, but yet in a manner which, in her retentive faculties, has left many traces of discipline, and, while other women have slept, Bella has read and reflected. There is scarcely a book written or translated into the English language concerning the dark shade of human life and character that she has not read, marked, learned, inwardly digested and pondered over; and wonderfully swift, subtle, and dangerous is the action of the woman's brain.

“She is a little fool !”

She of course means Lady Ennisford.

This is the first half-audible ejaculation in a contemptuous voice, as she sits one instant apparently engrossed with her own image in the mirror, and the next looks at an exquisitely embroidered cushion that lies on an opposite sofa.

“*She* worked that. I would stake my life on it! She is only fit for crochet and crewels and all the little stupid frivolities of life, or to sit, dazed and useless, seeing her child dying before her eyes.”

Bella has unmitigated scorn for most women, especially those afflicted with nervousness, and she has also a detestation of all feminine fine arts. When necessity compels her to sew she likes to make good, coarse, useful clothing. The rough texture and rude work suit her character. The

delicate, flimsy work her sex affect call down her strong disapproval, and she always dresses in “rational” garments, after Lady Harberton’s heart, the which decidedly add to her *bizarre* appearance.

“Why did George marry that girl? She is plain, and dowdy, and dull—dull as ditch-water. There is not a spark of intelligence in her insignificant features—not a vestige of style about her. Any housemaid looks more *distinguée* than she does. It could not have been because she was the daughter of a duke. He did not require to marry for position or wealth. So it *must* have been for love—*love*! Save the mark. Love must be blind, and deaf too, to have discovered attraction in Lady Ennisford! He is tired of her already; I can see that well enough. And he is glad to have me here. But, Bella Grant, you are not a fool—don’t

go and delude yourself, like some love-sick fledgling, that he wants you because he cares for you. It is only because he cannot be so wholly self-satisfied by anyone else! Not by any other woman—last of all by his wife. Ennisford could never be content long with anyone who did not feed him on sugar—who did not praise him, flatter him up without reservation or stint. She believes that she is the only woman in the world for him, and that she will remain for ever the only one.

“She does not realise a bit how handsome he is—as handsome as a god. But the world is full of women who can see it and say so, in sweeter words than she has dreamed of in her poor, tame, spiritless life. But no matter about others yet. At present I have only to deal with one rival, and that is Lady Ennisford!”

Her voice drops to a whisper, and a dark, evil shadow flits over her face.

“If I cannot have Ennisford's whole heart, neither shall you! I am here now, and here I shall stay, *tout vient d celui qui sait attendre!*”

A minute or two of dead silence, in which a pin's fall may be heard, follows this threat, then there comes the echo of a man's step, a buoyant, springy step, betokening a light heart and a thoroughly mercurial temperament. Bella has found out already, after a few hours' sojourn at Highcliffe, that Lord Ennisford, who has been writing in the library, will have to pass her door on his way to bed, and for this reason she has left it ajar. He sees a tiny streak of light streaming into the passage, and, as he passes, he looks in.

She sits, her chin still resting on her hand,

a big hand, with strength but no refinement about it; and her face, instead of being turned to the glass, is bent downwards, as though unconscious of her surroundings. She is lost in some remote land of thought. She is a born actress, this Bella Grant, and could win fame and fortune on the lyric boards, and it is a thousand pities that Fate has not given her a profession or occupation, instead of leaving her to a life of chagrin, and disappointment, and mischief-making.

“Where are you, Bella? I doubt if you know yourself! you are in such a brown study,” Lord Ennisford says, pleasantly, at the open door. “I want to tell you that I am so glad to see you again. It seems just like old days—this.”

How many men are apt to make silly speeches which they repent of bitterly at

leisure? And this is a silly speech, for Bella flushes up vividly as she listens, and a glow of exultation goes through her, but she only answers quietly enough :

“ And I am very glad to be here, George, you don't want to be told that. I wished to say something to you this first day of my coming, but as I had no opportunity of doing so downstairs, I left my door open on the chance of your passing. George! I do so want you to forget that we were ever more than cousins! I ought never to have reviled you as I did that day—but I had an excuse, dear. You see that in losing you I lost—Everything! I knew I could never care for any other man, *look* at any other man after *you*; you have spoilt me! You make every other man in the world appear so ugly and coarse and altogether not worth respecting.”

She brings it out so frankly and innocently with a lovely childish candour that of course he swallows with avidity the pernicious flattery, and never even remembers that it has been hurled at him, and by no means adroitly administered as many worldly women would have done. Unconsciously he softens towards her, and putting his hand on her shoulder, looks smilingly down on her upturned face. He does not realise that there is a lurking wish within him to show her once again the supreme beauty of his ultramarine eyes and his chiselled mouth.

“Don’t be absurd, Bella!” he cries, complacently; “and don’t go and make an Adonis or a Paladin of me! There are lots of fellows who beat me hollow in looks and brains too, I am afraid.”

She shakes her head dubiously.


“Those lots of fellows are not in my line, George! but I would rather not allude to the past, if I can help it!—Though *what* a past is has been! Like an April day—so sunny and so stormy. So full of horrible pain, and yet so full—so full of infinite bliss. But after to-night, I will never talk to you about it—*à quoi bon?* Do you remember what Swinburne says in his exquisite triumph of Time?

“ ‘ Ah! had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives—and the years let go,
The wine and the honey—and balm and leaven.
The dreams reared high, and the hopes brought low.
Come life—come death—not a word be said,
That I lose you loving, and vex you dead.
I never shall tell you on earth, and in heaven,
If I cry to you, will you hear or know? ’

Oh, George! George! I dare not tell you a lie, and say that your love is become a thing of the past to me! but I have sworn to keep my regret to myself, I only want to see you—to stay with you and—yours.”

Lord Ennisford listens, and is really moved at her unselfishness, and moreover he is agreeably surprised. Somehow he has dreaded an outbreak dreadfully, and it is very comforting to know that Bella has at last accepted her cross with a meek resignation that certainly adds to her attractions. She has hitherto shown an inclination to be a virago—but all that is finished. And now she is willing to be useful, and not *exigeante*. This aspect of affairs is very soothing, and argues quite a peaceful and pleasant future. So he pats her kindly on the arm, and even taking her hand, holds it closely in his own.

“You are going to be our good angel, after all, Bella, I see! You have cast a spell over the boy already. He was sleeping quietly just now, and he has not seemed so well for weeks. And Lady



Ennisford, poor child! she will brighten up now into her old self again! I fancy she looks considerably changed to you, doesn't she?"

"Remarkably changed—I should never have known her! How old is she, George? She looks very faded and worn—poor thing!"

Lord Ennisford winces and frowns a little. To hear that his wife of two years' standing presents a faded and worn appearance is scarcely gratifying, but Bella says it so sympathisingly that of course he cannot credit her with malice.

But now she has suggested it, he thinks Frances is wonderfully gone off in so short a time.

"You see she has suffered so much anxiety about the boy," he answers, deprecatingly. "She is so very young, too, that

she cannot stand wear and tear like older women; but she will soon come back to her beauty and brightness with rest."

Beauty and brightness.

Bella makes a grimace of derision at such expressions being mentioned in the same breath with Lady Ennisford, but it is not a part of her diplomacy to show her cards, so she averts her head, and takes the opportunity of inclining it a little, so that it leans slightly against his shoulder.

"What makes *me* so unhappy is the change in your appearance, Ennisford!" she says, regretfully.

"In my appearance! Why I am all right, Bella!"

"It would take more than two years of mental suffering to break down your health, of course, dear! You have such a magnificent physique. See! what a glorious

broad chest this is, and those stalwart arms!—do you know I used to feel as if I was in my tower of strength when you put them round me in the old days!” she whispers, softly, and Lord Ennisford hears her heart beating fast. “But there! I am treading on forbidden ground again—only the past is my all, you see! and it *will* crop up every hour of my life. Yes, George, you look mentally wearied out. I, who look at you freshly and dispassionately, see the difference, and mark the distinction. You are overtaxed, I think you have been moping—cooped up in the country with only poor, tearful Lady Ennisford and a sick child to contemplate. You ought to run up to town—take up some of your old friends—drop in at a theatre or two, and rub off your country rust. Even your face is altered, now that I really examine

it! the radiance of its beauty is a little dimmed; your bonnie blue eyes have lost some of their sunny charm and I do believe!" —she puts her hand (she is nearly as tall as he is) on his crisp, blond curls—"there are some silver threads among the gold already! Oh, George! what on earth has aged you so?"

Lord Ennisford plumes himself greatly on his personal appearance, in fact, not being a clever man, he has had to trade on his beauty always. From his youth upwards he has been fawned on by women and told of the exceeding perfection of his hair, and eyes, and nose, and mouth, and it naturally vexes him that even this woman, who has been his adoring slave, should detect flaws that must make him less attractive to her.

"Nonsense, Bella! I am not changed a

scrap, and am perfectly sound in mind and body," he says, a little fractiously, but her sharp cat's eyes note with satisfaction the tide of colour come up into his cheek, and is sure her words have taken effect.

"It is true, of course, that I have been worried, how could it be otherwise with Lady Ennisford so fidgetty and frightened and the child squalling nearly all the time. If he gets on, and those atrocious teeth come safely through, I shall try and have a week in Scotland, and give my wife a change too: I to fish and she to sketch, that is if I can make her forget the baby for awhile. She draws and paints splendidly, you know. Here is one of hers, Bella!" and he walks right into the room and up to the mantel-piece. "It is full of feeling and genius, I think! Look! isn't this bit of water a marvel of

transparency, and these long low lying clouds are so real and filmy, with the seagulls swooping below and the depth of twilight beyond ! ”

He dilates on the picture so enthusiastically that Bella feels the old wicked wrath surge up as she listens to the outburst. She is awfully jealous of him, of his every look and word, and she is a woman who can do anything in her paroxisms of fury and mortification. She knows she cannot trust her voice at once, and is silent till she contrives to tone it down to a proper pitch, and though she gazes at the picture, that hangs close before her eyes, she really does not see a line of it.

“ Yes, it is very well done, Ennisford, I have no doubt ! but I am no judge. It’s all I have been able to do to read a few books,” she says, modestly, but with tre-

mendous contempt for Lady Ennisford's artistic efforts in her heart.

"True," he answers, indifferently; then he adds, patronizingly, "But you are awfully useful, Bella, and a first-rate companion to any man who has brains. After all, a good practical, sensible woman beats your accomplished female to fits." And while he speaks he entirely forgets that he is in a manner depreciating his wife to elevate the woman who hears his words, with triumph in her cold grey eyes, and a heightened colour on her sallow cheek.

"Sit down a moment, Ennisford!" she says, pushing him gently in to a great chair, whose spreading arms and velvet cushions look inviting, "it is so much more comfortable sitting than standing to chat. I want to tell a little home news; about the Duke and your mother, and all the

doings. Belgrave Square is dreadfully changed since you married."

"Is it," he asks, lounging back in the *fauteuil*, and looking the picture of handsome indolence and ease, as he puffs away at his cigar, sure that Bella doesn't mind it a bit, though Lady Ennisford grows sick and pale as the first fumes of the fragrant weed reach her nose; "how?"

"Oh, it's a perfect prison house for dullness. The Duke sticks to White's more than ever, and my aunt to her own chair; your sisters hardly ever come near us, and Bertie, who might enliven us a bit, writes that he can't get away from Vienna, as his diplomatic duties prevent, etc.—but I think he has an attraction there. I did hear that he had gone mad over Lady Aylmer, who has been setting the Viennese by the ears with her exceeding fairness and

her flirting propensities. Lord Aylmer has gone to India on the Governor General's staff, and she has it all her own way during her grass-widowhood. Bertie is very impressionable, you know, poor boy, much more so than his elder brother."

"Yes, *I* am not impressionable, thank goodness. I hate one of your spoony chaps," Lord Ennisford assents, between his puffs. "I can understand a fellow falling in love with one woman, but I *can't* stand that fashion of losing one's head or one's heart to a dozen."

He looks up as he winds up his sentence and catches a peculiar meaning in Bella's eyes, and, colouring, he says confusedly, and inconsistently with his former remarks, "A man can't be expected to stick to one woman all the days of his life, either. *Toujours perdrix*, it is enough to tire any one,

you see, Bella. *Ours* was a short life and a merry one together!" and he laughs. As the laugh falls on her ear it stings her like a scorpion. So he can look back on those days, over which she sits and dreams by the hour, as just a mere ephemeral "spoon," pleasant but neither a matter of regret nor remorse.

"Bertie is impressionable," she says, ignoring his allusion, "and not only impressionable, but earnest, and a boy whom a woman like Lady Aylmer can make very miserable. I am very fond of him, and I should hate to have his life spoilt."

"I have never seen Lady Aylmer—funny enough, but I don't think you need fret yourself so much about Bertie's welfare!" Lord Ennisford answers, jealously; "men don't make themselves fools for women like *her*, it wants more than

mere flesh and blood attraction to spoil a fellow's life, you know!"

"Everyone says you worship beauty, Ennisford," cries Bella, surprised at his new sentiment. Surely he is not really in love with his plain, dowdy wife, with her brown skin, and her brown hair, and brown eyes to match.

The fact is incredible and she rouses into anger at the very thought.

"Do they?" he says, quietly, blowing blue circles of smoke up towards the ceiling. "Well, perhaps I *did* as a boy—that is, *sometimes*!" and he gives her an expressive look, which she understands; "but *now* I like *good* women—*spirituelle* women—women with soft, yielding natures; sweet, loving dispositions, gentle voices, instead of flashing or languorous eyes, Grecian profiles, rosebud mouths! And I certainly like a

woman who is not a disturbing element in one's life, as Lady Aylmer is sure to be. I am growing old, you see, Bella, and grey hairs grow best with peace and comfort."

"I fancy age *does* rather dull one's appreciation of beauty and ripen our perceptive faculties of virtue," Bella observes, with an incredulous smile. "Queer, is it not, how stupid pretty women generally are, and women with brains so plain! I suppose nature is too just to make both casket and contents lovely. I wish the casket had been attended to in my case!"

"Why?" Lord Ennisford asks, a little dreamily, as he looks down at the woman, who has seated herself on a tabouret at his feet—her old position of worship in old days—and who is looking up at him now with a flush really like damask roses on her usually pale cheek, and with a wistful,

yearning expression in her eyes that lends them a strange and subtle charm.

“Why?—oh, because then, before you grew old, you might have really loved me!” she answers, scarcely above a whisper, while her hand steals into his.

Is it the glamour of bygone hours, or his own impressionable nature, in spite of his assertion to the contrary, or is it that Bella exercises a certain Mephistophelean influence, but somehow Lord Ennisford presses the hand that has stolen into his palm, and, bending forward, his lips abide in very dangerous proximity to hers.

Will he kiss her?—the woman who is a serpent on his hearth, who is the mortal enemy of his domestic happiness, and in whose black heart lives a fearful, grudging rancour to the poor pale little wife upstairs.

Bella's pulses throb like so many sledge


hammers ; it is long, very long, it seems a whole existence, in fact, of pain and starvation since the last time his kiss was laid on her mouth. The flush waxes deeper on her cheek, and her greedy grey eyes gleam and scintillate and seem to scorch the fair, handsome face of her old lover.

“Love! my love!” she murmurs, and she stretches her arms towards him.

Lord Ennisford starts as if he had been shot, as the passionate words fall on his ear. He has not quite gone to the bad yet.

In those burning eyes, in those yearning arms, he reads his danger at once. He recoils with a certain revulsion from them and contrasts them unfavourably with the quiet, pale tints, and large, limpid brown eyes of his wife.

Springing to his feet, he nearly capsises the footstool on which Bella has placed her-



self, and he flings the remnant of his cigar impetuously into a Dresden casket hard by.

“Good night, Bella,” he says, abruptly, and before she has time to reply, he runs up the stairs as if a fiend were in pursuit.

To say that he experiences an overwhelming sensation of relief, as he enters his bedroom and closes the door behind him, would not be an exaggeration.

It appears to him as if he has just aroused from a horrid nightmare, in which Satan has had a hard tussle to keep him hand and foot.

In a bewildered, dazed sort of fashion, he wonders whether Bella is a woman or the devil incarnate, when he meets Lady Ennisford’s eyes.

She is sitting up in bed, her hair unloosed, falling over her shoulders in heavy dark masses, enframing her face and making

it look smaller and thinner than usual ; tears trickle slowly down her cheeks, and her mouth quivers like a child's.

“Why, what is the matter?” he asks, crossly.

The tears and the quiver act upon him in his excited state just like a cold water douche. True, the atmosphere below suggested brimstone ; but this seems chilly as ice, and the contrast is not pleasant.

“I have waited so long—so long!—for you, George!” she murmurs, disjointedly.

“That is just what I have been doing for you for the last three months,” he answers, impatiently.

“Never! when I could help it, darling!”

“Tush!—*that* does not alter the fact.”

Nothing can be harder or more unsympathetic than the tone of voice in which he utters these words ; and, whatever the pro-

vocation may be, she knows that he has never spoken like this before.

“Oh, darling! how can you speak to me like that!” she cries, amidst little choking sobs, in which unhappiness and a tendency to hysteria are painfully blended.

If he would just take her in those stalwart arms of his, that Bella had called a tower of strength, and say one gentle word, all would be changed; but in his present state, when the equilibrium of his mind seems to be totally upset, such a proceeding appears impossible.

He has not dreamt of making his wife unhappy or neglecting her in any way; indeed, in that last little hot episode with Bella, his wife had seemed to come nearer his heart than she had ever done before.

But the trail of the serpent is over him still.

He has been drinking in greedily great draughts of flattery, and it has lifted him instinctively and insensibly into a condition of elation and self satisfaction, from which it is not at all easy to descend.

To think how women admired him and adored him, while all his own wife had to give him were tears and reproaches.

“I can bear much, Lady Ennisford ! I have borne much !” he says, formally, with a martyr-like air, “but there is a limit to everything in this world. I hate scenes !—so good-night !” and stalking majestically into his dressing room ; he bangs to the door.

A few minutes afterward, a low timid tap falls on his ear. It is Lady Ennisford wrapped in a white dressing-gown, her long hair still falling round her, down below her slender waist. She looks like a ghost, so

little and colourless and fragile, as she glides noiselessly with bare feet into the room and sinks down in a white heap at her husband's feet.

What a contrast she is to the woman who crouched there half-an-hour back.

Bella looked so thoroughly material with her glowing skin, her passionate eyes, her cruelly tender mouth, her hot clasping hands, her cry for love ! love ! and Lady Ennisford seems so apart from all that is of the earth earthy, so pure and so delicate !

Perhaps it is the very contrast that brings Lord Ennisford to his senses. He raises the slight figure from her knees and holds it against his breast with all the warmth of earlier days, and he softly kisses off the tears that still glisten on the long brown lashes.

"I was a brute—my pet !" he says, peni-

tently, "a thorough paced brute! to think, when you have suffered so much, that I should go and add my mite to vex you!"

Lady Ennisford clasps her slender arms round his neck and fresh tears well up in her eyes, but she hides them.


Ennisford is himself again, but somehow she feels that with Bella Grant's appearance at Highcliffe has come the first unkind words from her husband's lips.

"How late you sat up writing, George!"

"Bella stopped me to say, good-night," he tells her bravely.

She makes no answer and stifles back a rebellious sob.

But Bella has done good work for the very first day. She sends Lady Ennisford to sleep with a pained and heavy heart.



CHAPTER VIII.

A WINNING GAME.

Alas !


There where I had garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or have no life,
The fountains from the which my current run,
Or else dries up to be discarded thence."

IT would indeed be strange if Bella felt no reproach of conscience, no whisper of the still, small voice, as Lord Ennisford's quick ascending steps sounded on her ear. She is not wholly bad, no human creature ever is. The veriest sinner amongst us has some redeeming point, even if it be so engulfed in a maelstrom of vice, that the world, not over given to charity "which suffereth long and is kind," does not stay to pick out the atom from the mass.

That Bella does feel something is evident,

for she mutters, "She took all I had! there were heaps of men about who would have made her happier than this man can, but she took him, my all—all, and I have nothing left. So shall I give him up to her in peace, and just bear my cross meekly, because it is right to do so? Never! Why should I be left and she be taken. What is she! what business had she to be his wedded wife while I am but his discarded plaything." And a little later, like all coarse, material temperaments, she drops into a pleasant profound slumber and dreams that she is Lady Ennisford and mistress of Highcliffe.

"Do you mind if I take down your lovely sea piece and hang up a photograph of Ennisford in its stead," Bella asks, meekly of her hostess, on the day after her arrival. "The photograph has hung for nearly two years just opposite my bed, where I could see it



the last thing at night and the first thing on awakening, and I shall miss it so ! ”

“ Certainly ! do as you wish,” Lady Ennisford answers, with a flush sweeping her pale cheek, but with her usual sweetness, for she has an angelic temper, and even this Bella, whom she feels is an enemy, fails to ruffle it. “ I can quite understand any one being discontented with a view of the sea when they can see Lord Ennisford ! ”

“ You don’t really mind, do you ? ” Bella says, with an attempt at archness that contrasts badly with the haggard drawn lines on her face, as she throws open the door of her bedroom and notes Lady Ennisford’s look of surprise, on finding her own sketch, its face to the wall, on the floor, and in its place a new, grandly framed tinted photograph of her husband in the gorgeous war paint of the Guards.

"I did not know you had made the change already," she remarks, with a little stately gravity, that Bella resents terribly within.

"I knew you would not mind," she says, with a dash of flippant indifference. "Of course I shouldn't have thought of doing such a thing without your permission, but you and Ennisford are *one*, and he wished it."

"Did Lord Ennisford tell you he wished his likeness to hang here?" and two pure eyes, guileless as an infant's, fix themselves with a sort of wistfulness on Bella's face.

This face of hers does not change colour one whit, neither do her lids droop over her light grey eyes, as she replies, unhesitatingly, with an appalling effrontery and disregard of truth,

"Yes! he has always liked me to have a portrait of him in my room."

"Then you are quite right in doing so," Lord Ennisford's wife answers, quietly, while a sharp pang goes through her heart. What right has this Bella Grant or any other woman to look on her husband's handsome face "the last thing at night and the first thing on awakening!"

"I have turned your painting to the wall, that the dust might not hurt it," Bella observes, sweetly.

"Thank you!" Lady Ennisford murmurs, coldly and, to her companion's thinking, haughtily.

"Pride shall have a fall," she registers to herself before she goes on glibly with a purr in her voice, that many feline women possess.

"Isn't this a most delicious likeness of
VOL. I. M

Ennisford? so life-like, so speaking. Do you know, I thought when he sent it me that you must have stood within sight for an inspiration while it was taken; and I was so surprised when he told me you were not with him—that you did not even know he sent it. By the way, I am older than you, and may be able to give a few useful hints. You must impress on his mind that nothing begets distrust in husband or wife like secrecy on one side. Of course, in the matter of this photograph, it could only have been thoughtlessness on his part. He could have no object in keeping from you that *he* gave me this!”

“Certainly not!” says poor little Lady Ennisford, confusedly but loyally, She would eat her heart out with jealousy and misery, yet never let an outsider know that she had not the most implicit faith and

trust in her husband. "There is nothing on earth I admire so much as Lord Ennisford's picture, except himself; there cannot be too many likenesses of him in the house to please me! I am not strong and soon grow tired; and Lord Ennisford would not think of subjecting me to the fatigue of a long sitting at a photographer's, you know. This picture is certainly perfect," she adds, enthusiastically, her brown eyes kindling and her voice warming as she looks up adoringly at the good-looking, fair face, that seems to look down at her with its own insouciant smile and sunny blue eyes, out of its setting of blue velvet and gold. And as she gazes once more, a sharp twinge comes to her as she remembers she has neither seen this "delicious likeness" or heard of it.


She has nothing of an actress in her composition, and it is therefore absolutely out

of her power to pretend to anything she does not feel. Lady Dundas, one of our most worldly and critical *femmes du monde*, had said of her as a *débutante*,

“One of Frances Clavering’s chief faults is that she shows everything in her face—a sure sign that she lacks that great gift of self-control, which is a supreme essential for preserving *les convenances*.”

So the heavy heart and wounded spirit with which she stoops for her sketch do not escape the lynx eyes of Bella ; and it is quite true that this worthy young woman rejoices in her first thrust having had effect—it portends final victory to her.

Lady Ennisford feels instinctively that all that has been said by her guest has been actuated by a desire to give pain. She has little or no knowledge of human nature—a knowledge which can only come to us



by actual contact with various types and the infallible conviction that is born of profound experience ; but, in its stead, she has keen instinct and clear intuitions, and through these she discovers at once that this cousin of her husband's, who has come to live under the same roof and eat at the same board, is a wolf in sheep's clothing—a cat with silken paws. But she does not quite realise why this woman should dislike her or wish to hurt her.

Not so Bella. She measures her victim perfectly in her capacity to suffer pain, and with equal accuracy she gauges her own power to inflict it.

Lady Ennisford's first conscious effort is "not to mind." She takes up her poor little painting which her husband had admired, and she orders it to be hung up at once over the escritoir in the library, so

that his eyes may rest on it. In this proceeding she has two ideas—one is to give him pleasure she hopes; the other, that seeing it there may make him speak to her openly of the portrait that Bella has of him.

Meanwhile, she walks slowly upstairs, and sitting down by her baby, gives way to a childish fit of tears.

When Lord Ennisford comes back from his drive, he walks straight into the library, which is his usual resort. He starts at the painting, which he had so graphically commented on as a marvellous bit of transparency in water, and full of life and genius in the low lying clouds, the swooping sea-gulls, the mystic twilight, meets his eye.

“I suppose Bella has turned that out,” he mutters, wrathfully; “how dare she do such a thing! I must nip such impertinence in the bud;” and, without reflection,

he pulls the bell violently, and demands that Miss Grant shall be sent to him at once.

A moment or two afterwards, in comes Bella, to find him flushed, and with unmistakable anger in his face, as he strides up and down the long room, a habit of his whenever he is vexed, and with which she is perfectly familiar.

She glides, with her noiseless, cat-like step, to a chair; her garments are sombre in hue and severe in fashion. She wears her hair cut short and after the type of a German student, and her hard, sharp, sallow face, with the daylight streaming upon it, looks harder, sharper, and more sallow than ever; but her attitude is meek, even deferential; her large hands clasp; her figure bends a little forward; and her eyes, so grey and light, a curious


contrast to her hair and skin, are lifted deprecatingly to her cousin's.

"Did you want me, Ennisford?" she asks, after a while, mildly. He pauses in his rapid walk, and, placing himself *after* the manner of a Britisher, with his coat tails to the fire, faces her.

"What did you mean by turning that painting out of your room?" he questions, angrily.

"I did not turn it out, but Lady Ennisford said I am welcome to hang up that large photograph of you instead of it. She likes me to have it, in fact, and does not mind how many portraits of you are about."

"She said that?" he questions, eyeing her keenly and waxing more wrath, but now with his wife, for it hurts his enormous self-love intensely that she should



not mind other women having his likenesses.

"Yes!" answers Bella, unflinchingly, quite indifferent how she perverts Lady Ennisford's words. "But what a fuss you make about that painting, Ennisford! It is very nice, no doubt, but one would really fancy it was a Millais, or a Turner, or a Tenier, by the value you put on it."

"I value it fifty times more because it is my wife's work," he answers, valiantly, though inwardly the accession of a red patch on Bella's sallow cheek and a glitter in her uncanny eyes make him a shade fidgetty. "And, Bella, I think it very bad form of you to flaunt my photograph and your love, as you please to call it, for me, before Lady Ennisford!"

"I couldn't hide my love for you before Queen Victoria herself; no—not even if

my life depended on it!" she says, hardily; "and if you are so tender of Lady Ennisford's feelings you should not have let me come here! But, George, I'll do my possible," she adds, in a low, fawning voice, fearful lest she has said too much. "I'll keep a guard over my eyes and my lips. I'll be a hypocrite—a sham—a lie, sooner than you should look at me like that! You hate me, I believe!" and, burying her false face in her pocket handkerchief, a puny, gaspy sob meets his ear. He puts indignation into his pocket, and with a couple of hasty strides stands beside her.

"Please don't cry, Bella! I did not mean to hurt you, but you see I am in a confounded hole. Lady Ennisford has a right to reproach me for all my shortcomings, and she never will. You have

no right, but you are perpetually hurling invectives at my head. I want to be nice with both of you, if I can. I have no desire to cut up rough, if I can help it."


At this Bella indulges in a little smile within the folds of her handkerchief. He is dreadfully weak, unstable as water, as has been said before, but she forgives the blemish, since on it she trades, and hopes by it to reach her aim some day.

"You are always nice for me," she whispers, holding out one hand, which he clasps, thinking it a guarantee for her good behaviour in future. "And if you will only smile upon me sometimes there is nothing I will not do, no matter how difficult; and it *is* difficult, George—almost beyond the pale of human will, to keep a vigilant watch always over a love which is *my* life!"

“Do you still care for me, then, as much as you did, Bella?” he asks, in a low voice, disgusted with himself for putting the question, yet quite unable to resist the pleasing incense that the liking of a woman—even a woman like this—is to him.

She lifts up a pair of flaming, blazing eyes, and he knows at once that he has needlessly brought himself to the very brink of a volcano.

“Do I care for you as I did, George? Do you ask that! Cannot you see, cannot you tell, oh! cannot you *feel* that love like mine ripens with time; that hour by hour, day by day, week by week, aye, year by year it grows and grows until at last it swallows up every other thing—hate, bitterness, revenge; a sense of duty, a horror of wrong: it makes one selfish,



wicked, cruel as the grave ; it is a heaven in itself, but the breast it dwells in is a hell ! It is with such a love that I love *you !* ”

“ But, Bella, I am another woman’s husband now, and that fact should make you try to forget what has been, and to reconcile yourself to what must be,” he says, remembering the good little precepts of his youth, but from which he has sadly departed.

“ What must be ? ” she answers, “ what *must* be ? George ! have you and I lived so long in our world and have to learn yet that duty follows inclination and not inclination duty ! Have you grown so rustic, so narrowminded as to believe that because an old priest has gabbled a few words over you and your wife’s head that marriage is anything but an

certain correspondence all that is the right of heaven there is nothing so appropriate as a true union of soul and heart—heart life and heart life is to keep it from wandering. There was a time when I had said what you and I used to agree that nothing in the world could equal the idea of a true existence which Balzac and Flaubert have painted in such glowing colours. It is the fashion to abuse it, I know, but in our hearts we all agree with them. Love is the fulfilling of the law, George. Love, not cut and clipped and ruth-

lessly pruned by the hand of prudery and propriety, but true to nature, self-absorbent, self-abnegatory, vehement—*mad*, if you will. It is with this love that I love you, George, and who shall throw—
We are not—
more

more passion than reason. Is it my fault that passion overmasters my reason now ; that when I see you, my eyes refuse to take in aught else, and my soul knows but one thing—that I love you. I love you ! Remember—

“ ‘ If such love to madness given,
Be wrong to earth, be wrong to Heaven,
’Tis not for thee that love to blame,
Since from thyself the madness came.’ ”

I know I am only one of a host of women to whom this madness has come, but the love of that host would be but a hundredth part of the feeling that lives and leaps in my heart for you.”

As Lord Ennisford listens he feels a certain sense of pleasure and gratification, though, to do him justice, there is not a vestige of reciprocity in his breast.

This woman, with her queer ways and words, her *bizarre* notions, her utter want

of personal attraction, is yet the woman for a man like him. She is as restless as a panther in her movements, so vehement in her language, so out of the way in her sentiments, and of such a wild and passionate temperament, that she can never pall upon him as a gentler, quieter, better woman might do. Bella is like a tropical sky, blinding, bewildering, scorching; and such a sky, uncomfortable as it sounds, has to some men a peculiar charm that the monotony of a blue serene heaven does not possess.

Lady Ennisford, pure-natured as a limpid spring, is yet but water to this woman, who is wine; and the man, lost in self-appreciation, forgets that the love of such as Bella is viler than her hate.

She glances up, when her violent protestations are over, to mark how he takes

them, and detects a little smile of complacency lurking in a corner of his handsome but weak mouth. He has likened her before this to a female Mephistopheles, and, as she remembers it, she determines to carry out the resemblance as far as she can.

“You are not angry with me now, George?” she cries, gratefully. “I see you are not by that little smile. Do you know that those smiles of yours are the sunshine I love best? but I should like to bask in them with my eyes shut and my ears deadened to everything else. I want to make a little compact with you; will you agree?”

“*Cela dépend*, you see, Bella. You might want my *soul*. I have often wondered if you are a woman or a—devil! It is so strange that, when you have no single

beauty to recommend you, you should still be able to influence a man against his will and his better judgment."

Bella frowns covertly at this unflattering remark, still it is gratifying to feel that, ugly as he deems her, she has won him from other women many a time, whose faces have been the rage of town.

"The compact I want to make is this. I will behave as well as the most stiff and starch spinster would approve of—before people, so that when we are alone you will be as you were before, George—before Lady Ennisford came between you and I."

Lady Ennisford!

As the name is brought before him, he conjures up the little childish figure wrapped in white, with the loose waves of dusky hair falling around it like a veil, the large frank brown eyes filled with tears,

the quiver of the babyish lips, two slender arms forming a circle round his neck.

His heart softens wonderfully.

He feels that it is unloyal to listen to Bella's expressions of love, but he is helpless. Bella has it on the cards to turn the home which promises an Eden into a hell, by revealing to his wife's ears that unlucky past which he would now willingly undo. So he resolves to temporise.

"We'll see, Bella," he says, scorning himself the while. "If you are really nice and civil to Lady Ennisford, and make her like you, perhaps you will find I am not quite such an icicle as you think. Men often try and resist temptation. Sometimes they succeed, but oftener—well, you see, *l'homme propose et femme dispose!* I am afraid I am not more immaculate than other fellows!" and he half sighs, half


smiles. "But, Bella, about that photo of me, which you have stuck up in your room. What did you tell Lady Ennisford about it?"

Bella eyes him keenly, and marks on his handsome, weak face just a shade of anxiety. He *does* care for his wife, or he would not surely be so considerate of her feelings, and this conviction hardens her at once.

"I merely said I wished to hang it opposite my bed, as I had been accustomed to see it every morning and night, the first and last thing."

"By Jove! what a thing to tell a fellow's wife!"

"Why? it was the truth and nothing but the truth; but you need not trouble yourself, as I see you are doing, my avowal did not affect her a bit. She simply



glanced at the photo, remarked it was a good likeness, and went on chatting about indifferent things. Good gracious, George! you cannot be a judge of character if you credit Lady Ennisford with deep feelings of any sort. She is very kind and gentle, just the wife for some old fellow who requires some one to sit at the head of his table, bring up his children, and jog along peacefully with him, like Darby and Joan, but her want of appreciation would drive a man wild who loved her, or fancied he loved her. Why, he might as well pour out his heart to that table, for any sympathy or reciprocity he could get."

"It's my wife you are holding forth about, Bella!" he says, indignantly.

"I know, but there is no harm in saying that she is as cold as I am warm, and as immaculate as—you are the reverse!"

"True!" he answers; "and you are right to a certain extent in your judgment of her—she *is* cold as a rule: but when cold women warm up, there is fifty times more attraction about them than in all your feminine volcanoes put together," he adds, quietly, and he feels quite sentimental for the moment as he recalls those delicious gloaming hours when he and Frances sat side by side in the flower-hung piazza, seeing the phantom-like ships go by, and knowing that they two were together until death (or the divorce court) separated them. In those hours he had seemed to realise Eve and Eden.

Bella hearkens to him, and laughs an unpleasant, mocking laugh.

"Did you tell Lady Ennisford *I* had sent you that photograph?"

"Yes!"



“When?”

“Just after your marriage.”

He looks at her steadily, and she returns the gaze, then her eyes turn away, and he knows she has begun her evil work already.




CHAPTER XI.


A CONJUGAL TETE-A-TETE.

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions."

AWKWARD about that unlucky photo!" muses Lord Ennisford, moodily, when Bella leaves him to his own devices. She has tarried as long as she could in the library, but she knows that it is fast approaching the hour for afternoon tea; and somehow, bold and defiant of spirit as she naturally is, she does not care for the big, brown, steadfast eyes of her hostess to see her in milord's own especial sanctum. "I wish I had made a clean breast of it, and told Frances at the time I had sent it, but I was not at all sure she



would like it. *Now*, if she makes a *moue mutine* or any fuss over it, I shall just take the high ground, and maintain that it was the most natural thing in the world to give a cousin some sort of wedding present! her little ladyship is really *exigeante* though who would imagine it on looking at her; and I would just as soon run the gauntlet of a Roman inquisition as hers if I had been doing anything not quite *comme il faut*. She's a perfect little Puritan in conscience, the result of training, I fancy; mamma Sandowne is a regular martinet with her offspring. Poor little Frances! it *must* have seemed pretty hard to her about that cursed photograph, in the way that Bella probably told the tale — not a plain, unvarnished one, I'll wager. Trust her for reporting matters in the worst light! She




is the devil in petticoats, when her back's up."

On the conclusion of this cheerful soliloquy he marches straight up to the nursery, where he knows he will find the partner of his bosom—and he is right.

Lady Ennisford occupies her usual seat beside little Lord Chester's cot. Her face is a little paler than usual, and considerably troubled, but her eyes are tearless; she has begun to leave off those childish fits of weeping, which leave traces in unbecoming red about her nose and her lids. She is not angry or sulky, only distressed, for anger and sulks are things which none of the numerous daughters of the Duchess of Sandowne would dream of exhibiting to their lawful lords and masters.

"Not well to-day, darling?" Lord Ennisford asks, in a cheery voice, stooping



and planting a warmer salute than usual on his wife's forehead.

She looks up at him with decided volumes of reproach in her glance, but they are mingled with a vast yearning and wistfulness which denude them of all that might be aggravating, and taking his hand meekly she kisses it.

Upon this he feels quite criminal inwardly, and dreadfully penitent, both feelings which he, however, keeps to himself, for he has a firm conviction that the worst move in matrimony is to wear the white feather.

"Yes! I am pretty well, Ennisford," she answers, in a low, depressed tone,—
"but——"

"But?"

"Oh, nothing! I don't feel quite happy, that's all!"


“Why?”

A sudden nervousness about broaching the subject rushes over her. She is one of those rare women who would bear an immense deal in preference to raising a domestic storm. There are plenty about who love these little tempests in tea kettles and to whom there is quite a pleasant excitement in turning the house upside down, but Lady Ennisford is not one of them.

It may be that she is still so over head and ears in love with her husband, that the faintest shadow of a shade between them assumes gigantic proportions in her adoring eyes.

Seeing her hesitation, he rushes bravely to the point at once.

Speak out, Frances! for goodness sake don't smoulder—pour out the vials of your wrath, and relieve your feelings. It's about



that stupid photograph, of course ! I sent for Bella, and found out what had passed, and there is really not a vestige of a reason for you to bother yourself about such nonsense !”

All this, said in a light, careless, off-hand fashion, which, by the way, does not correspond to the compunction which he undoubtedly feels within, has, at any rate, the effect of increasing her nervousness, and also conduces to make her already slightly ashamed of having given a thought to the subject.


“I have tried to get it out of my head, George ; but I can’t !” she murmurs, like a child, in a heldless, hopeless sort of voice, which is evidently having a struggle with a ball in the throat. “Why didn’t you tell me you were going to send it, and so soon after our marriage, too !”

The last part of her sentence is decidedly irrelevant to the first ; for the time of his sending it is not so much to be blamed as the fact. She, however, harps inwardly on his having chosen to think even of another woman in those halcyon, never-to-be-forgotten hours when love was young but faith and trust full grown in her fond heart.

“ Why didn’t I tell you ?—Because women are so confoundedly unreasonable as a rule ! When we first married, of course, I did not know if you were like the rest of them, and Bella bothered so for one that, to get rid of her importunities, I sent it. *Voila tout !* ”

Voila tout !

This is how he ends his sentence, and a good many men beside him wind up their domestic orations with a sort of crusher-like “ *voila tout !* ” cried indifferently, and



meant to be a final stopper on the feminine tongue.

“I should not have been annoyed by her having it, but it makes me miserable to think that you could not confide in me, and that perhaps—you are capable of deceiving me!” she says, with a little gasp. “I could not deceive you, George, in the littlest, *littlest* trifle—not if my life depended on it! and nobody could have made me believe that you would say or do anything that you were not quite willing to tell me!”

“Bosh! There isn’t one man in ten thousand who tells his wife everything he does. There are such lots of extenuating circumstances about a man’s actions, you know!”

She doesn’t know—but she listens and feels a little misgiving as to the soundness of his sentiments. Still it is “George” who

speaks, and "George" is her law—her creed, and it is difficult not to believe him infallible.

"You see, Frances, I have spoilt you, made you *exigeante*, self-willed, by my absurd devotion, and now you are ready, at the smallest provocation, to pose as an injured woman!" he flashes angrily.

Lady Ennisford neither resents nor does she think of retorting. She is quite sure she is not a bit *exigeante* or self-willed; but it is his will and pleasure to say so, and why should she anger him by contradiction? So she rises, and going towards the distant seat in which he has flung himself, perches on his knee, and slipping her arm around his neck, she opens her heart to him.

She is not an eloquent woman, but love, the greatest teacher, has taught her simple

language to this one man, which tells him somehow how dearly she holds him.


“I don’t know how to make you understand just how I feel, darling! I do not expect to have you tell me everything—that is, everything about ordinary matters, you know! But in anything that concerns us two, our life, our love, oh don’t let there be any reserve, any concealment! it makes me so awfully unhappy! *I* haven’t a thought—I *couldn’t* have one that I wouldn’t tell you!”

And down goes a sleek brown head on his shoulder, so that a few rebellious tears shall trickle down comfortably on his coat without his being cognisant of them.

But Lord Ennisford, like all the house of Bramber, is not easily appeased. He has not a bad temper, but he is selfish to the

backbone, and he hates even his own conscience to prick him and make him not quite at his ease in this charming, beautiful world. He knows he has a lot to conceal from this adoring, clinging wife of his, and the very fact makes him more irritable. Even about Bella there are things which he feels sure would cause a positive rupture between him and his wife, and between him and the world even, if they chanced to come to light, the very folly and weakness—not to say sin—of allowing the woman he had flirted with to come and dwell under the same roof with the white-souled girl he had wedded.

But it is no good crying over spilt milk, he thinks, with the *insouciance* of his thoroughly mercurial temperament. Bella is here, and here Bella will remain ; so, instead of responding to Lady Ennisford's



appeal, he has the heart absolutely to push her off his knee—gently, it is true, but firmly.

“A bad beginning of married life, very bad,” he says, solemnly, with an air of intense martyrdom; “this is not the first time we have exchanged bitter words and recriminations, Frances. You must really learn to curb your temper. I had no notion of its violence. I shall soon be afraid to think how it will all end.”

She stands just where he has pushed her, very white, a good deal of bewilderment in her eyes, and a sense of supreme injustice in her breast; and before she has time to collect herself, he catches up his hat and reaches the door.

“Ta! ta!” he cries, carelessly, “I am off for a ride; when I come back, pray let the domestic horizon be clear and pleasant,

or I shall take to-night's express for town.
I can't stand rows."


He hesitates a moment outside the door, while his good and bad angel has a struggle for him. The bad angel wins :

"Don't give in : a woman, a dog, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them the better they be."

So he strides away with two red spots like live burning coals burning on his cheeks, and his blue eyes wearing a vexed expression, and Bella, as she catches sight of him from a window that overlooks the drive, smiles quite cheerfully.

"Marriage isn't quite a heaven to him I see," she mutters, half audibly, "he was not made to be a model husband, so how can he help it, my poor Ennisford."

By-and-by, after a good gallop over the downs, and with his equanimity restored by the exercise and fresh wind, Lord Ennisford once more mounts the broad staircase



slowly, a little fearful lest a dark browed visage and a pair of sullen eyes will greet his coming.

His wife is playing with the boy, swinging a coral and bells on a chain before his eyes, and enticing him to stretch out two tiny hands to catch it. Lord Ennisford recognises in a second, with the keen love of beauty, that is his principal blemish, that the mother and child make a very pretty picture. Lady Ennisford wears a dress of some soft tender hue, just relieved with the bright warm red which her clear, colourless skin needs; and baby's frock matches the true blue of his father's eyes and his own. He is playing, and laughing, and crowing, and the picture is decidedly charming. If it was not, the man with his senses always on the alert to be pleased, would not be as attracted as he is.

Bella is not looking on, forming a trio as she does often now, forgetting that two's company and three's none, in the desire to interfere between husband and wife.

Lord Ennisford knows that if her grey eyes were by, he would no more think of speaking out his feelings than of jumping over the moon, something in her presence cramps all his good impulses, and sets his bad qualities astir.

He walks up straight to his wife and takes both her and the boy in his arms, and little Chester, with the wisdom that we are told babes and sucklings possess, instead of resenting the unusual familiarity, laughs and crows once more, and twists his fingers in his father's crisp fair curls.

"How pretty we look, baby and his

mother," Lord Ennisford says, warmly. "I behaved horribly to you, Frances, before I went out, but don't punish me for it by pitching into me too hard."

From these words one would think she had been punishing him by her tongue for at least two hours, whereas she has hurled no reproach and felt no resentment.

It is perfectly characteristic, however, that he should assume the attitude of the aggrieved party. In all their little differences, it is always she who begs to be forgiven. He is a man who can acknowledge in an off-hand magnanimous sort of way to a whole mass of faults, with a mock shame and deprecation in his manner and voice, but to actually ask for pardon for any one sin is thoroughly repugnant to his constitution, and quite contrary to his way.

Nevertheless his overtures now are so

winning, and he himself such a model of manly good looks, that Lady Ennisford's grievances vanish into thin air, and her heart leaps up to its idol.

Putting her child into its cot, she once more settles herself on her husband's knee.

"Baby is much better," she says, brightly; "he grows quite strong, George, and in a week or two we might have that run up to Scotland you promised."

"Would you really like it, pet."

"Yes! the air up North would do me good. I feel as if I was stifling sometimes down here," she murmurs involuntarily, thinking of Bella. "If we could take baby with us, it would not be requisite for Miss Grant to remain here now, would it, Dear? It would be very lonely for her, you know," she adds, her conscience pricking her for being Jesuitical.

“Nonsense! *she* won't be lonely! she is a queer sort of girl, she doesn't care for society, and in fact she always shuns it; perhaps it's because society doesn't love *her*, she is so ugly, you know.”

He really means what he says. He thinks Bella about as plain-headed a young person as he has seen—though at times the influence of the hour has made him overlook her utter want of attraction in a weird charm she has for him; but Lady Ennisford's jealousy is only half asleep, and she glances up at him quickly.

“Do you really think her ugly, George? She has a clever face, you know, and some people admire that more than downright beauty.”

“*I* don't. *I* love pretty women!” he confesses, unblushingly. “A fair face


plays the devil with a man, even if the owner of it isn't nice."

"Does it! I wish I had been beautiful," she says, very wistfully.

"Why?" he asks, with a strange intentness in his blue eyes, and he draws her closer in her arms.

"Why? because I believe beauty is the greatest gift a woman can possess," she answers, a little dreamily. "It must be so delicious to think that one has the power to win love anywhere and under any circumstances."

"Frances! I shall begin to think you are like other women if you talk like that!" he cries, quite jealously, for no matter how great a flirt he is, what right has his wife to a thought of love, save as a sober domestic Diety, waving no flaming torch aloft, but holding a well-trimmed



lamp turned down and giving a nice, moderate, steady light.

“I shall begin to think that you want not one admirer but a dozen; that you care not to gladden my eyes only but to look lovely in many men’s! Well, little woman!” and he draws his breath quickly as he glances at her face, which, in its dreamy, tender aspect is looking at its very best, “be satisfied! you are very good-looking; quite as pretty as a woman who does not wish to pose as a professional beauty, or a flirt, ought to be!”

His voice, which has a harsh ring in it, takes her so much by surprise, that for a moment she does not answer; then, in spite of herself, hot tears well up—she is certainly a tearful woman, this Lady Ennisford—and tears are the best weapons when a man’s in love, the

worst when he is growing cold. Just now, Lord Ennisford *is in love*, or fancies he is.

“That was not what I meant, George! I was not thinking of other men—what do I care for them? I was only thinking that if I had been beautiful—the memory of my beauty would be a safeguard to your heart when you went to town. I only longed to be beautiful to keep *you!*”

“I believe you!” he replies, brightly, kissing her half-a-dozen times. “You are the purest, sweetest child in the world, and I love you with all my heart! I really think no one is so happy or content as you and I, Frances!”

“As *me?*” she whispers.

He smiles—a smile which in the gathering dusk Lady Ennisford catches.

It seems to fall like a ray of sunshine on her, and the memory of it will linger with her later on, perchance when a rift in the clouds may be a boon in her life.



CHAPTER X.

“SHE’LL DIE, MY LORD.”

“The sacred love o’ weel-placed love,
Luxuriantly indulge it,
But never tempt th’ illicit rove,
Though naething should divulge it.
We’ll waive the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing.
But, oh, it hardens a’ within,
And petrifies the feeling.”

LADY ENNISFORD feels as if she had been born again after this tender little scene; kissing her husband is a great treat to her still, although she has been married over two years, but then she is a little obsolete in very many things. She cannot kiss him, however, always, which, perhaps, makes the operation more attractive. Sometimes it appears to her as if to kiss him is impossible; sometimes

as if it is inevitable. He is the same man to be sure—but the same man divided by such extreme and alien moods that for kissing purposes he might just as well be two.

She has forgiven him fully and freely about the gorgeous photograph, on which Bella's grey eyes rest with love and longing—but Lady Ennisford has learnt a lesson—and that is, that her husband is quite equal to doing anything he deems fit to do without taking her into her confidence. Before she really learned this fact, she would have disbelieved it, and now that she is quite cognisant of it, it gives her inexpressible pain; but *à quoi bon?* The leopard could as easily change his spots, and the Ethiopian his skin, as Lord Ennisford could his nature; and that nature has several blemishes, and among them is

an overwhelming liking for women, and a weakness, where they are concerned, that is fatal.

If Bella had not been domiciled at Highcliffe, the poor little wife might have more chance of peace and happiness. She is easily content; a word, a smile, a kiss from her lord and master raise her to a seventh heaven, and she has no curiosity to peep into Bluebeard's chamber, unless the key was put into her hand. She is too guileless and good herself to suspect, and fully exemplifies the old adage, that "to the pure all things are pure."

Still Bella has her advantages; with her supervision, little Chester decidedly improves and grows, and even fattens. She cannot of course, change his delicate organisation, or prevent him having the quantum of teeth natural to the human race, nor can

she make their advent pleasanter, but she makes all the drawbacks to his small existence easier to bear.

She manages to soothe him wonderfully when he is in pain, and if he persists, with an obstinacy that is in the Bramber blood, in exercising his lungs, she just carries him right away out of hearing of the paternal ears, and thus saves Lord Ennisford many a pang to his delicate tympanum.


But the advantages and disadvantages of Bella's presence are very unequally balanced. The baby has his hours for sleeping like a little top, and in those hours, as husband and wife sit down together, they share each other's society with Bella. Lady Ennisford's heart rebels against this third presence more than she knows of—or if she does know—more than she would dare to acknowledge

to any living soul. She is of a timid character, and would rather eat her heart out than complain to an outsider, It is not the mere fact of Bella being there, upon which she dwells, but upon the fact, to her unaccountable and painful, that her husband never appears the same to her with Bella's eyes looking on, as he is when they two happen to be quite alone.

If he breaks out perchance into his old spontaneous warmth, she sees that he immediately checks himself, looks at his cousin to see how she bears it, and instantly addresses some propitiatory remark to her.

It is just as if he was eternally asking Bella's pardon for being fond of his wife.

She thinks it all well over, and arrives at the conclusion that she is not mistaken on the subject, for if her husband's words do



not convey the impression, his manner certainly does.

Herein, though little, Lady Ennisford is far from being profound or given to much thought, another psychological "why" rises up to torment her.

"Why is George not the same to me in her presence?" she catches herself wondering. "Is he afraid of her?"

But then the idea strikes her as preposterous, and she dashes it away angrily.

With the episode of the photograph still in vivid remembrance, she shrinks from opening a new cause for discussion. It appears to her that if he is unconscious of wrong, he will feel her to be dreadfully suspicious and unjust. Bella makes it still more difficult, she gushes over her hostess in a saccharine fashion; she waits upon her, makes it her study to anticipate all her

little wants and wishes all in a sort of patronising, petting way, as if she were a child. To Lady Ennisford, who is by nature and breeding self helpful, such extreme service is officious and irksome, yet she dares not show her distaste to it for fear of being considered ungracious or ungrateful.

“Why Bella seems quite your right hand, Frances! how on earth have you ever managed to get on without her?” Lord Ennisford remarks, thoughtlessly; but in the next instant he is vexed at his own folly, for Bella accepts the little outburst with a meek and deprecatory smile, that irritates him horribly, for he knows that she is of anything but a retiring or modest nature, and that she fully measures the amount of her own services.

“Miss Grant does more than she ought to do,” Lady Ennisford remarks, simply, and

a little formally. She cannot get over *Miss Grant*.

The name of Bella always struggles with a ball in her throat for utterance, though she tries to say it to please her husband. He thinks her cold and uncivil now, but ventures on no remonstrance and Bella herself feels that she does not hoodwink the object of her attention.

How can she! when there is not a day on which she does not contrive to make her, Lady Ennisford, uncomfortable or unhappy. A sincere and truthful nature—no matter what its intellectual qualities may be—is never a match for a nature brimful of guile; for if even by painful experience, the good nature finds out the weapons of the wicked one, it will not stoop to use them.

There is nothing so hateful to Lady Ennisford as unnecessary mystery; hints,

inuendos unfinished and unexplained always bewilder her, for if she has anything to say, she says it fully and frankly, and if it is best that it should not be said, she makes no reference to it. But Bella, like all women of her calibre, is replete with mystery. She hints of past episodes in Lord Ennisford's life of which his young wife has never dreamt, and infers that they were facts, which would cause infinite misery if their real nature were known. She insists on copying the MSS. of a three volume novel which Lord Ennisford has taken a freak to write, a first venture on the literary sea, on which he expends all his spare hours in the library, aided by Bella as an amanuensis.

It is of course very foolish of Lady Ennisford to creep out of her warm comfortable bed and go, shivering the while, and close all the doors she can, so that she may not

hear those low tones of Bella's voice indulging in a long discourse in spite of the copying process.

"I cannot bear all this much longer," Lady Ennisford whispers to herself pitifully, for she knows what the next day will bring her in the shape of hints.

"Ennisford said——," followed by the sudden ejaculation, "But oh I must not! I promised him not!"

"Not me?"

"No! But it was really nothing of consequence—only—so strange!"

Bella is a woman with a savage nature. She is savage and cruel in love, and savage and cruel in hate, and she possesses that rare and unenviable faculty of seeming to pay a compliment and in the same sentence making the subject of her praise appear to disadvantage. She is prolific in such compli-

ments to her rival, as she always calls her inwardly ; and when the disparagement comes in, Lord Ennisford looks up startled and astonished that he has never seen his wife in that light before.

Bella has also an odd way of fixing her cold, grey gleaming eyes on her victim, and, with what some poet calls "the silent smile of cold disparagement," makes her conscious of a shoal of drawbacks personal and mental.

There is no spirit—not even the bravest—that is bomb-proof against the constant stings of gnat-like remarks. The soul that can face a fierce assault undismayed sinks helpless under minute but perpetual tortures, even as the dropping of water wears out a stone. And poor Lady Ennisford, just when she most needs rest to regain her lost strength—lives in a tumult

of mental and spiritual conflict that consumes her vitality and makes recuperation absolutely impossible, and all the more because the conflict goes on in her own brain and bosom and she keeps it carefully hidden away from all eyes.

"You must take Lady Ennisford away my lord," the doctor says one day, with grave eyes and voice. "She must have change of air and scene, at once." And Lord Ennisford listening to him, feels quite a shock; for, in spite of all his shortcomings, he is really fond of his wife: fonder of her than he has ever been of any woman in his life

"Don't let her take the child. She can do it no good at present and it can do her great harm. If you want her to live, my lord: you must take great care of her, you don't know how terribly weak she is,"


Dr. Blendon says, abruptly and frankly : for he has been medical adviser to the Brambers for ages, and known the younger branches since their infancy.

“I know she is far from strong,” Lord Ennisford says, a tide of blood rushing to his heart and leaving his face very pale. “But you frighten me. What do you mean?”

“What I say! Lady Ennisford is very delicate, take her away, have your honeymoon once again, and bring her back a new woman. If you don’t, she’ll die, my lord!”

“Good God!”

Striding into the house, he looks keenly at his wife’s face, as she sits facing the light, neither working nor reading, but gazing out with listless eyes, and her little hands folded loosely on her lap.



It is surely true what the doctor says, she'll die: her face is dreadfully white and wan—her large brown eyes look double their normal size from the broad *bistre* rings encircling them—her always slight figure is painful in its fragility.

"She'll die."

The words haunt him so, and at this moment, as she catches sight of him her lips part in the sweetest tenderest smile.

Bella, her evil genius, is not present, and in a trice he has his arms round his wife—hiding his face on her hair so that she may not see the scare on his features.

"My darling! old Blendon says you must have a change at once—and if you do, that you will come back as strong as ever. To think that my little girl is so sick!"

The last simple words are uttered in

such a tone of affection, as he draws her head on his breast, and the words and action are so unexpected and so rare now, alas! that Lady Ennisford does what she has a habit of doing, she weeps—but in joy.

“There, Frances, pet, I wouldn’t cry any more,” he whispers, patting her softly on the back; a soothing process which he has seen applied to his son and heir. “I agree with Bella that you *do* cry too much! It keeps you weak; and, darling, you don’t look pretty when you cry—no woman does, out of a novel, you know! and I want you to look always pretty.”

“But I was never pretty, George, you knew that when you married me,” she murmurs, dashing away at her eyes and choking back a rebellious sob or two.

"No! I didn't. I never saw a girl prettier then you *can* be if you would only stay so!"

"You don't know how much I wish I could, for *your* sake. *Your* wife ought to be so very beautiful, George," she says, looking up at his handsome face, handsomer still from the emotion which shines in his ultramarine eyes.

"That's just what Bella was saying the other day, but in condemnation of what she calls my 'born artist' proclivities for lovely faces. But never mind about such nonsense, we'll go to the wilds of Scotland and have our honeymoon once again, the world-forgetting-by-the-world-forgot sort of thing—you know, my pet! And I shall see the pretty roses come into these white cheeks and bask in the light of the brown eyes that I fell in love with under

the trees at Clavering. When shall you be ready to start?"

She thinks of the boy, and hesitates.

"Must baby——" she begins.

"The boy must stay here; Bella will look after him better than you can. You must not have anything to trouble you—only *me*," he says, positively, and in spite of the wrench it is to leave the child as he smiles down on her, she feels that it will be immense happiness to have him all her own with no woman to intermeddle with her joy.

Once more—poor little fool!

July, 1883.

F. V. WHITE & CO.'S SELECT NOVELS.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. each.

THE FOLLOWING VOLUMES OF THE SERIES ARE NOW READY,
*And can be obtained of all Booksellers in Town and Country, and at
all Railway Bookstalls.*

Those marked thus () can also be had in Picture Boards, 2s.*

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL. By FLORENCE
MARRYAT, Author of "Love's Conflict," "Phyllida,"
"A Broken Blossom," &c., &c., &c.

"'The Root of all Evil' is quite up to Miss Marryat's reputation, and can be honestly recommended to those who enjoy a good strong story, capitally written, in this clever writer's best style."—*Morning Post*.

ALLERTON TOWERS. By ANNIE THOMAS (Mrs.
Pender Cudlip), Author of "Denis Donne," "Friends
and Lovers," &c.

*THE DEAN'S WIFE. By MRS. EILOART, Author
of "My Lady Clare," "How He Won Her," "Some
of our Girls," &c., &c., &c.

"Any reader who wants a good story thoroughly well told cannot do better than read 'The Dean's Wife.'"—*John Bull*.

"'The Dean's Wife' must be classed as a decidedly good novel."

Graphic.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

***MY SISTER THE ACTRESS. By FLORENCE
MARRYAT, Author of "A Broken Blossom," "Phyl-
lida," "How They Loved Him," &c., &c.**

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"'My Sister the Actress' is the best novel we have had the pleasure of reading from the pen of Miss Florence Marryat."—*John Bull*.

"The three volumes will be read through with avidity."

Court Journal.

"'My Sister the Actress' is infinitely above the average run of novels. . . . A skilfully told and remarkably interesting story which will add to Miss Marryat's reputation."—*Court Circular*.

"The tone of the book is distinctly wholesome."—*Scotsman*.

"It is both clever and amusing."—*Daily News*.

"Everywhere it is fresh, lively, and thoughtful."—*Public Opinion*.

"The characters are drawn with great power. . . . The story is one of unusual interest and ought to secure a great number of readers."

Sunday Times.

"We can fully recommend the book to our readers as being thoroughly interesting and cleverly written."—*Sylvia's Home Journal*.

"It is a very pretty story and told in the Author's happiest manner."—*Morning Post*.

"We have been agreeably surprised, and have no hesitation in placing this latest work far beyond her previous novels."—*Lloyd's*.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

***A BROKEN BLOSSOM.** By FLORENCE MARRYAT,
Author of "Phyllida," "Facing the Footlights,"
&c., &c., &c.

"Deserves to be ranked as the most artistic and altogether the best work of fiction its clever and prolific author has yet written."

Scotsman.

"A really charming story, full of delicate pathos and quiet humour, pleasant to read, and pleasant to remember."—*John Bull.*

"'A Broken Blossom' is a pleasantly told tale, and will doubtless find acceptance with many."—*Morning Post.*

***SWEETHEART AND WIFE.** BY LADY CON-
STANCE HOWARD, Author of "Mollie Darling,"
&c., &c.

"The story from first to last is attractive, and cannot fail to command wide favour. . . . There is, indeed, throughout the whole of the story a most unusual power, not only of language but of imagination, and the tender pathos, which is introduced in no laboured fashion, adds a charm which it is difficult to describe, but impossible for the reader not to appreciate."—*Whitehall Review.*

"There is a genuine flavour of the old-fashioned romance in it which is too frequently lacking in what may be termed the latter-day novel."

Court Circular.

"'Sweetheart and Wife' is a love idyll, skilfully painted in the midst of many people and many scenes, described by one who writes with that very rare attribute of the modern novelist—knowledge of, and familiarity with, the society she pictures."—*Life.*

"So many pretentious people write stupidly and ignorantly of fashionable life that it is a real pleasure to come across a novel by one who is thoroughly familiar with Society and all its little vanities. From this point of view 'Sweetheart and Wife' is a book which is likely to be in great demand at the circulating libraries for some time to come. It is a love story, told with charming simplicity and not a little power. Many of the descriptions are full of picturesque beauty, the dialogue is strikingly natural, and the plot is consistently and cleverly developed."

Society.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

***TWO MEN AND A MAID.** By HARRIETT JAY,
 Author of "The Queen of Connaught," "Madge
 Dunraven," "The Priest's Blessing," &c., &c., &c.

"Compared with the former works of the authoress of 'The Queen of Connaught' this novel must be pronounced second to none."

Graphic.

"The gradual building up of the incidents preceding the wedding and the dim foreshadowing of catastrophe are managed with such skill as to produce the greatest excitement of expectation."—*Sunday Times.*

"Abounding in pathetic incidents and strongly dramatic situations."

North British Daily Mail.

PHYLLIDA. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of
 "My Sister the Actress," "A Broken Blossom,"
 &c., &c., &c.

"This is one of the most fascinating and interesting novels we have met with for a long time."—*Sunday Times.*

"This is the best of Miss Marryat's works; the plot is original and fantastic, full of spirit and vitality. 'Phyllida' is decidedly one of the best novels of the season."—*Court Journal.*

"'Phyllida' is a novel of which the author may justly be proud."

Morning Post.

"It is brightly written and thoroughly readable."—*Lloyd's.*

"'Phyllida' has all the advantage which a very striking and dramatic opening can give it."—*John Bull.*

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

BARBARA'S WARNING. By MRS. HOUSTOUN,
Author of "Recommended to Mercy," "Lost in the
Crowd," &c., &c.

SOME OF OUR GIRLS. By MRS. EILOART,
Author of "The Dean's Wife," "How He Won Her,"
&c., &c., &c.

"... The book is well worth perusing."—*John Bull*.

"'Some of Our Girls' must be commended as a book with an unusually good purpose, and as quite interesting enough to deserve the attention of the others of 'our girls' to whom it appeals."—*Globe*.

"The freshness, the purity, the simplicity of style, the truth and the directness of purpose which always characterise Mrs. Eiloart's novels make them very enjoyable reading; and in all these points 'Some of Our Girls' is fully up to the level of its predecessors . . . and few who take up the book will lay it down without feeling that the author has contributed to their intellectual enjoyment."—*Scotsman*.

A PROFESSIONAL BEAUTY. By MRS. ALEX-
ANDER FRASER, Author of "Guardian and Lover,"
"A Fatal Passion," &c.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

THE PRIEST'S BLESSING. By HARRIETT JAY,

Author of "Two Men and a Maid," "The Queen of Connaught," &c.

(Dedicated to the RIGHT HON. W. E. FORSTER, M.P.)

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"Told with much pathos and power."—*Era*.

"We can say for ourselves that we have read its three hundred pages with unfailing interest."—*Saturday Review*.

"It is an interesting story, and thoroughly well worth the perusal of all who have the welfare at Ireland and the Irish honestly at heart."
Sunday Times.

"Intimate knowledge of the national character is shown by the writer, who inscribes her book to Mr. Forster in earnest and somewhat impulsive language."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"Miss Harriett Jay is already so well known to the public as a perfect mistress of style, that we need bestow no greater praise upon the little volume before us than by saying that in this respect it fully justifies the reputation acquired by the author of 'The Queen of Connaught.' . . . Is well and boldly written."—*Court Journal*.

"Miss Jay paints with graphic power the scenes of the story, and some of her descriptions of events and incidents are most vigorous and refreshing in their terse eloquence."—*Nonconformist*.

"Any one who wishes to realise the mischief which may be done by the ceaseless plotting of the Catholic priests cannot do better than read 'The Priest's Blessing.'"—*Lloyd's*.

"The novel is certain to attract exceptional attention."—*Graphic*.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

POPULAR 2s. NOVELS.

A BROKEN BLOSSOM. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "My Sister the Actress," "Phyllida," &c., &c. In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"Deserves to be ranked as the most artistic and altogether the best work of fiction its clever and prolific author has yet written."

Scotsman.

"A really charming story, full of delicate pathos and quiet humour, pleasant to read, and pleasant to remember."—*John Bull.*

THE DEAN'S WIFE. By MRS. EILOART, Author of "How He Won Her," "Some of Our Girls," "My Lady Clare," &c., &c. In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"Any reader who wants a good story thoroughly well told cannot do better than read 'The Dean's Wife.'"—*John Bull.*

MY SISTER THE ACTRESS. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "Phyllida," "How They Loved Him," &c., &c. In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"Will be read through with avidity."—*Court Journal.*

"'My Sister the Actress' is infinitely above the average run of novels.

A skilfully told and remarkably interesting story which will add to Miss Marryat's reputation."—*Court Circular.*

"The tone of the book is distinctly wholesome."—*Scotsman.*

"It is both clever and amusing."—*Daily News.*

TWO MEN AND A MAID. By HARRIETT JAY, Author of "The Queen of Connaught," "My Connaught Cousins," &c. In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"Compared with the former works of the authoress of 'The Queen of Connaught' this novel must be pronounced second to none."

Graphic.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

POPULAR 2s. NOVELS.

AN INNOCENT SINNER. By MABEL COLLINS,
Author of "Too Red a Dawn," "In the Flower of
Her Youth," &c. In picture boards, 2s.; post free,
2s. 4d.

"Miss Collins, who writes with correctness and vigour, has chosen in 'An Innocent Sinner' to rely for interest on an entirely new combination of circumstances. This . . . is elaborated with some skill."

Athenaeum.

"Thinkers, who are not too wise in their own conceit, will give the book a much higher place in their esteem than is usually accorded to a work of fiction. . . . The book is one that ought to be both read and studied."—*Whitehall Review*.

"Decidedly remarkable, and very well worth reading."—*Morning Post*.

"Of peculiar originality and power . . . For her freedom from extravagance in dealing with a topic which makes extravagance an almost irresistible temptation, Miss Collins must be especially commended."—*Globe*.

"Must certainly be acquitted of any tendency to the conventional or commonplace—the besetting sin of the novelists of the day. . . . The situation is, no doubt, a delicate one, but we do not think the author's treatment of it can be fairly objected to on the score of propriety or good taste."—*Graphic*.

"There are both prettiness and ingenuity in the novel which Miss Mabel Collins, the clever daughter of a gifted father, has written—'An Innocent Sinner.' There is a grace and a power, as well as a strangeness, about the book, which will secure for it many readers."—*World*.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

POPULAR 2s. NOVELS.

HOW HE WON HER. By MRS. EILOART, Author
of "The Dean's Wife," "My Lady Clare," "Some of
Our Girls," &c., &c.

In picture boards, 2s. ; post free, 2s. 4d.

A FATAL PASSION. By MRS. ALEXANDER
FRASER, Author of "A Professional Beauty,"
"Guardian and Lover," &c., &c.

In picture boards, 2s. ; post free, 2s. 4d.

SINK OR SWIM. By MRS. HOUSTOUN, Author of
"Recommended to Mercy," "Lost in the Crowd," &c.

In picture boards, 2s. ; post free, 2s. 4d.

EYRE OF BLENDON. By ANNIE THOMAS
(Mrs. Pender Cudlip), Author of "Friends and
Lovers," "Allerton Towers," &c., &c.

In picture boards, 2s. ; post free, 2s. 4d.

GUARDIAN AND LOVER. By MRS. ALEXANDER
FRASER, Author of "A Peeress of 1882," "A Pro-
fessional Beauty," &c., &c.

In picture boards, 2s. ; post free, 2s. 4d.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

POPULAR 2s. NOVELS.



THREE FAIR DAUGHTERS. By LAURENCE BROOKE, Author of "The Queen of Two Worlds," &c.
In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"This is a novel which shows real literary skill and no small acquaintance with his craft in its author."—*Spectator*.

"Mr. Brooke has told well what he had to tell, and has produced three readable volumes, natural, entertaining, and fairly artistic. . . . 'Three Fair Daughters' is a pretty and a prettily-written tale."

Athenæum.

"A vein of pleasant humour and lively fancy runs through this story from beginning to end."—*Queen*.

"Laurence Brooke is a brilliant writer."—*Court Journal*.

"There is not a dull page in the whole three volumes."—*Scotsman*.

"In furnishing light, pleasant reading and drawing lively pictures of modern society, Mr. Brooke has few rivals."—*Morning Post*.

SWEETHEART AND WIFE. By LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD, Author of "Mollie Darling," &c.
In picture boards, 2s.; post free, 2s. 4d.

"The story from first to last is attractive, and cannot fail to command wide favour. . . . There is, indeed, throughout the whole of the story a most unusual power, not only of language but of imagination, and the tender pathos, which is introduced in no laboured fashion, adds a charm which it is difficult to describe, but impossible for the reader not to appreciate."—*Whitehall Review*.

"There is a genuine flavour of the old-fashioned romance in it which is too frequently lacking in what may be termed the latter-day novel."

Court Circular.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

**POPULAR NEW NOVELS AT ALL THE
LIBRARIES.**

—••—

A FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE. By MRS. ALEX-
ANDER FRASER, Author of "A Peeress of 1882," "A
Fatal Passion," &c. 3 vols.

POPPY. By MRS. BERESFORD (Flora Hayter),
Author of "All Among the Barley," &c. 3 vols.

A MOMENT OF MADNESS. By FLORENCE
MARRYAT, Author of "The Root of all Evil,"
"Phyllida," "A Broken Blossom," "My Sister the
Actress," "Facing the Footlights," &c., &c. 3 vols.

"Our author writes in a lively and agreeable manner, and there is
nothing in these volumes which may not be read with pleasure."—
Academy.

LOVE AND ITS COUNTERFEIT. By ALICE
BERNARD. 3 vols.

VICTOR OR VICTIM? By JOHN SAUNDERS,
Author of "Abel Drake's Wife," &c. 1 vol.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

**POPULAR NEW NOVELS AT ALL THE
LIBRARIES.**

MONCRIEFFE'S SECOND WIFE. By LOLO,
Author of "A Cruel Secret," "Was Hers the
Fault?" &c. 3 vols.

"... There are many who will be delighted with 'Moncrieffe's
Second Wife.'"—*Public Opinion*.

MISS STANDISH. By MISS A. BEWICKE, Author
of "Onwards, but Whither?" &c. 3 vols.

AN APRIL DAY. By PHILIPPA PRITTE JEPHSON,
Author of "Lord Farleigh," &c. 2 vols.

"... This graceful story."—*Athenæum*.

"The story in itself is very real, full of true pathos, and not devoid
of power. . . . It is graceful and charming from first to last."

Morning Post.

"... It is altogether a pleasant story, pleasantly told, and worth
spending an idle half-hour over."—*Whitehall Review*.

"... It is charmingly and freshly told, the language is easy and
refined . . . there is a natural and pictorial grace about the book."

St. Stephen's Review.

"... The book is never dull. . . . The tone of the story is whole-
some, unaffected, and pleasant throughout."—*John Bull*.

"... This novel will be found attractive, and full of romance."

Public Opinion.

FRANK AYRTON. By MRS. J. M. M. HEWETT.
1 vol.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

POPULAR NEW NOVELS AT ALL THE
LIBRARIES.

IN THE FLOWER OF HER YOUTH. By
MABEL COLLINS, Author of "Too Red a Dawn,"
"An Innocent Sinner," &c. 3 vols.

"Miss Collins's ably-written story is likely to be well received."
Athenæum.

"Miss Collins is acquiring more strength and facility as she continues in authorship. The tale before us has some well-conceived situations."—*Academy*.

"Miss Collins has evidently thrown her whole heart into her work, for many passages are full of eloquence and fire. The pathetic scenes are composed with a power of detail that in many cases will thrill the reader. Engrossing as are the first and second volumes, the third far excels either. . . . Miss Collins is the author of several stories of fiction, for which she has obtained the good opinion of her admirers, but 'In the Flower of Her Youth' far excels her former efforts."—*Public Opinion*.

"Miss Collins may certainly be congratulated on having maintained, so far as the story itself is concerned, the originality of style which distinguishes her previous books."—*John Bull*.

"Brough, however, is sketched with so much fidelity that the portrait will certainly be recognised by those who remember the brilliant, genial, and jovial original who, not so many years ago, used to shoulder his way along Fleet-street and the Strand, and was once, by the way, a familiar figure in the streets of Nottingham. . . . The description of Siena is charming—a complete picture without dry detailed literalness, and replete with poetic feeling. 'In the Flower of Her Youth' is in almost all respects an able, and in many respects a powerful, book."—*Nottingham Daily Guardian*.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND. By Miss EDITH
STEWART DREWEY. 3 vols.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

**POPULAR NEW NOVELS AT ALL THE
LIBRARIES.**

SECOND EDITION OF

A PEERESS OF 1882. By MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER, Author of "Guardian and Lover," "A Professional Beauty," &c. 3 vols.

"A wide popularity may safely be anticipated."—*Morning Post*.

"Those who delight in love stories have a feast in store in these three volumes."—*Modern Society*.

THIRD EDITION OF

FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS. By FLORENCE MARRYAT, Author of "My Sister the Actress," "A Broken Blossom," &c. 3 vols.

"'Facing the Footlights,' as its name indicates, is highly melodramatic."—*Athenæum*.

"... Is at once an entertaining and well-written romance. ... The characters are admirably drawn. ... We must congratulate the authoress on the production of a really excellent novel."

Court Circular.

"... The story is interesting and well worked out."

St. James's Gazette.

FRIENDS AND LOVERS. By ANNIE THOMAS (Mrs. Pender Cudlip), Author of "Denis Donne," "Allerton Towers," &c., &c. 3 vols.

"The incidents of the story become most interesting from the charm of the writer's style."—*Queen*.

"... Will be welcomed by the large circle of Mrs. Cudlip's admirers. It is certainly in all respects equal to its now numerous predecessors, and in many points superior to many."—*Graphic*.

"Mrs. Pender Cudlip's tale has great variety of scene and incident. ... None of the usual materials for the making of a good novel are absent in 'Friends and Lovers,' and the author has shown much skill in weaving a more than usually complicated plot. This, united to the writer's style, always full of movement and brightness, will insure a large circle of readers for her latest work."—*Morning Post*.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

MISCELLANEOUS PUBLICATIONS.

OUR TOUR IN SOUTHERN INDIA. By MRS.
J. C. MURRAY AYNLEY, Author of "Our Visit to
Hindustan," &c. 1 vol., demy 8vo, cloth, 10s. 6d.

UNCLE ANTONY'S NOTE BOOK. By MARY
CAUMONT. Crown 8vo. Cloth, 2s. 6d. Post free,
2s. 9d.

"Miss Caumont has produced a volume of charming little stories for children, full of genuine pathos and dealing with subjects and incidents such as young readers can appreciate."—*Scotsman*.

"This little volume of tales for young folks is well written. . . . We can heartily recommend 'Uncle Antony's Note Book' for the amusement it affords and the sound moral it conveys."—*Court Journal*.

UNCLE GRUMPY, and other Plays for Juvenile
Actors and Actresses. By R. ST. JOHN CORBET.
Crown 8vo. Cloth, 2s. Post free, 2s. 3d.

"A pleasant little work, which will be a valuable acquisition to boys and girls in holiday time. The plays are bright and humorous, and, as set forth on the title-page, may be easily learned, easily acted, and easily mounted."—*Liverpool Daily Post*.

"As a book of parlour theatricals it is admirably suited to its purpose."—*Dundee Advertiser*.

HOUSEHOLD CHEMISTRY FOR THE NON-
CHEMICAL. By A. J. SHILTON, F.C.S. Crown 8vo.
Limp cloth, 2s. Post free, 2s. 4d.

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF FRED.
G. BURNABY, Col. Commanding the Royal Horse
Guards Blue, Author of "A Ride to Khiva." In
Picture Cover, 1s. Post free, 1s. 2d.

A REVIEW OF THE BELT TRIAL. With List
of Witnesses Examined, and a Sketch of the Life of
Mr. Belt, &c., &c. Price 1s. Post free, 1s. 2d.

F. V. White & Co., 31, Southampton Street, Strand.

NEW NOVELS IN THE PRESS.

PEERESS AND PLAYER. By FLORENCE
MARRYAT. 3 vols.

JENIFER. By ANNIE THOMAS. 3 vols.

WAS IT WORTH THE COST? By MRS. ELLOART,
Author of "The Dean's Wife," &c. 3 vols.

ON FOREIGN SOIL. By MISS M. MONTGOMERY
CAMPBELL, Author of "Amico's Little Girl." 3 vols.

TRUE TO THE CORE. By MISS C. J. HAMILTON,
2 vols.

FORBIDDEN TO MARRY. By MRS. G. LINNÆUS
BANKS, Author of "The Manchester Man." 3 vols.

UNDER THE LASH. By MRS. HOUSTOUN,
Author of "Lost in the Crowd," &c., &c. 2 vols.

UNDER THE BAN. By CHARLES GIBBON,
Author of "Auld Robin Gray," &c. 3 vols.

HIS DEAREST WISH. By MRS. HIBBERT WARE,
Author of "The King of Bath," &c. 3 vols.

ONLY AN ACTRESS. By EDITH STEWART
DREWEX, Author of "On Dangerous Ground," &c.
3 vols.

